



‘The Best-Kept Secret in Brown County’

BY SHIRLEY DUKES

The work morning here begins at 8 a.m., just as most of our typical work mornings start. However, past that, there is really nothing typical about anything that goes on here. While the rest of the world is punching the clock and logging onto computers or getting a cup of coffee to jump-start the day, the associates here at Aldersgate are meeting in the break room for a morning devotion followed by prayer requests. The scripture for this morning’s devotion is Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Anthony delivered the devotional, and the message he was trying to convey was that we all have bad days when we feel burdened. But as I said, there is nothing typical about this place, so I was not really surprised at the response he got. When he asked the assembled group whether they ever felt burdened, someone from the back of the room piped up and said “Not me, I work for Jesus!” Anthony just smiled and said, “I can’t add anything to that,” and the prayer request began.

The staff at Aldersgate Enrichment Center already had told me on a previous visit that it is impossible to have a bad day here. And it did not take me long to realize that they were right. There is just no way that you can walk into this place and not become overwhelmed with the love and happiness that radiates from every square inch of the 153-acre facility. If you ever just wish you could have a hug, this is the place for you! I received the sweetest and most loving hugs from almost everyone here. And I enjoyed it so immensely that I went back for seconds!



Associate James Blumenthal stands with just a few of the many custom picnic tables he has designed. If you can dream it, James can build it.

Aldersgate Enrichment Center was the brainchild of a group of United Methodist men from the Central Texas Conference. While at a National Congress, they found their hearts warmed when they heard of a ministry that had been started in another state. This ministry was a residential and vocational center to train mentally challenged adults. Through further inquiry, they discovered that not only had this ministry been very successful, but also there was a growing need in Texas for a similar type of center.

What began in April 1991 as a small pallet department in a rented warehouse in downtown Brownwood has grown today to a four-department operation on donated land just outside of Early, Texas. It consists of a Residential Program and a Vocational Program.

Residential Program

Currently, Aldersgate has two group homes that can house 21 residents. Each group home also houses one house pet for which the associates love and care. Each resident in the home is offered a private, furnished bedroom with lavatory, telephone and

TV. They are allowed and encouraged to decorate their rooms to suit their needs and their own personal style. The goals of the homes are to assist the residents in their daily living skills and responsibilities. Each resident living in the homes also works in the Vocational Program and is learning to be self-sufficient, to know their self-worth and to have the ability to reach their potential in all aspects of their lives.

Vocational Program

When the program was launched, it did so with the organization of the Pallet Department. At that time, 15 associates produced 600 wooden pallets per week. Today the department consists of 20 associates producing 600 pallets per day. What amazing growth! The pallets are then sold to companies that have come to depend on the quality and reliability of Aldersgate and its associates.

The Packaging Department employs about 25 associates who work to fill contracted orders. Its current contract is with Kohler Co. for which it packages approximately 125,000 bolt caps, cuts and boxes approxi-



Associates, from left, Rickie Greer, Fred Taylor, James Steel and Blake Hardesty assemble pallets.



Associates Randy Thorton and Tod Bishop take time for a break to race their cars while other associates look on. The day I visited, Tod had just met John Schneider from 'The Dukes of Hazard' and had received this autographed remote-control replica of the General Lee.

mately 32,000 pieces of flat cardboard, and assembles 4,200 trip levers per month to be used in the construction of toilets. The department also packages plastic dinnerware packets that consist of a fork, knife, spoon, napkin and, if so desired, condiments. These packets are custom-designed and are available in any quantity requested.

The Recycle Department consists of 10 associates who depend on the surrounding communities and private citizens to provide cardboard and newspaper for the Aldersgate team to recycle and bundle. Most people are aware that by saving their cardboard and newspapers products, they can benefit our environment. However,

they are unaware that by doing so, they can also benefit the Aldersgate associates. Please feel free to contact them if you have newspaper or cardboard that you would like to donate to their program.

And last but certainly not least is the Manufacturing Department. Here, associates make a variety of items that are sold seasonally at the Front Gate Gardening Gifts Store. Should you need to purchase items when the store is not open, or if you are unable to visit, call the office and someone will gladly arrange the sale for you. Some of the more common items produced are garden stepping stones, ceramic crosses and Texas stars. The stepping stones and crosses come in different

shapes and sizes with varying designs. Under the direction of James, this department also constructs a wide variety of handmade wood products. According to the staff members, if you can dream it, James can build it. Some of the more common items are birdhouses, beaded and wooden crosses, handmade benches and planters and several other unique items. The most popular items it produces are the handmade, custom-built picnic tables that can be custom painted with any logo, design or color. While touring the workspace, I also saw a beautiful foot trunk and sewing



From left, associates Ronnie Laird and Shane Treadway, staff members Liz Boyer and Shorty Kilgo, and associates Bat Bolton and Justin Newton help process cardboard in the Recycle Department.



Associates Matthew Wilkes and Toni Jackson display some of the beautiful stepping stones that are manufactured at Aldersgate and are sold in the Front Gate Gardening Gifts Store.



Associate George Norwood helps produce up to 4,200 trip levers per month for Kohler Co.



Associates John Storch, Krysta Romine and J.J. Perry show off the utensil packets that are assembled in the Packaging Department of Aldersgate Enrichment Center.

box that James had created, as well as some adorable lawn decorations.

Also, just beginning to take shape is what could turn out to be an additional department in the Aldersgate program. The center has recently received a contract from the Texas Department of Transportation to do highway cleanup. These associates are currently working in Callahan County to keep the highways free of litter and to help keep Texas beautiful. Just one more reason for the associates to take pride in the job they do and for us to have a reason to take pride in the associates of this organization.

Promise Singers

There are also the Promise Singers, a group of associates who are available to entertain you through music and sign language. They sing an average of four songs but could do more if desired. They are available to travel around Texas to churches and organizations who are in need of such services and who are willing to host them. I have seen them perform and can assure you that they are an awesome group.

The associates gave me a grand tour of each of their departments. They take great pride their work, in themselves and the organization for which they work. They have a definite

heartfelt appreciation of the companies that allow them to work and achieve the freedom and individuality that they are able to experience by being a part of the Aldersgate work team. Each associate earns minimum wage, and feels pride and dignity while actually earning a paycheck for themselves.

Expansion plans are always in the works at Aldersgate. Anything to bring more joy and happiness to the associates, as well as opportunities to be able to hire, train and house additional associates, is welcomed and encouraged. The most pressing concern at this time is to be able to construct a chapel on the grounds. Plans are in the works for a chapel to be built on the hill beneath the three flags that proudly fly over the site. The chapel will seat 200 and will be available for public worship, as well as for the Aldersgate staff and associates. The goal is to have the chapel available for worship by Easter 2008. All help is welcomed in this endeavor, so feel free to call and offer your services either monetarily or as a volunteer.

Aldersgate is a not-for-profit organization that depends entirely on contributions from individuals and other organizations, as well as receiv-

ing funds through sales and contract opportunities in the Vocational Program. Built on faith, the organization receives no funding from state or local government. Therefore, it welcomes any donations of money as well as volunteer work. In fact, Aldersgate considers its volunteer program to be one of its most valuable assets.

The staff here at Aldersgate Enrichment Center tells me that they are the "best-kept secret in Brown County." I see no reason why that should not soon be changed to "the most valuable asset of Brown County." If you have not visited the site, I encourage you to do so. With a simple phone call, you can set up a group or individual tour of the facility. And I can assure you that your heartstrings will be tugged, and you will leave there with a commitment to be a part of this wonderful organization that does so much for those who need it most.

You can find Aldersgate at 5000 U.S. 183-84 in Early or on the web at www.aldersgate-center.com. The phone number to arrange a tour, purchase items, or become a volunteer is (325) 646-5608. Give them a call or stop by to visit. I promise you will never regret it.

Where Does That Power Come From?

BY SHIRLEY DUKES

Over the past few months, we have been hearing stories from our members recalling when electricity came to their homes for the very first time. These were mostly tough farm and ranch individuals who lived in the rural areas and made their living off the land. These people can remember pumping water by hand, lighting their houses with kerosene lamps and burning wood for warmth, while people in cities enjoyed the labor-saving benefits of electrical technology. Although nearly 90 percent of the population of urban areas had access to electricity by the 1930s, only 10 percent of the rural areas did. Private utility companies argued that it was too expensive to run electric lines to rural farms and that the farmers were too poor to afford the electricity even if it were made available to them.

Thankfully, due to the approval of the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1935, government-backed loans opened the way for rural communities to form member-owned electric and telephone cooperatives. The REA was created by executive order as an independent federal bureau, authorized by Congress in 1936 and later reorganized as a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Comanche County Electric Cooperative Association was organized in 1938 as a nonprofit organization owned by the members it serves. The Articles of Incorporation were filed on August 23, 1938, in the office of the Secretary of State, and on August 24, 1938, the Secretary of State issued a Certificate of Incorporation to the incorporators. The first meeting of the incorporators and directors was held on August 25, 1938 at the Comanche County Courthouse. At that meeting, R.E. Seay was appointed board president, H.L.



Greg Peterson mans the control system at Brazos EC's Jack County facility.

Beaty was appointed vice president, and J.B. Cooper was selected as secretary and treasurer. Other directors were W.A. Smith, W.T. Carruth, W.J. Huddleston and W.A. Pettit. In August 1997, the word "County" was dropped from the name, changing it to Comanche Electric Cooperative Association, or CECA.

CECA is currently a member of Texas Electric Cooperatives (TEC), a statewide organization founded in 1941 and dedicated to representing the interests of cooperative electric utilities in Texas and the member-consumers they serve. TEC today represents 65 electric distribution cooperatives and the state's nine generation and transmission cooperatives. The association is headquartered in Austin, close to the legislative action that has and will always have a significant effect on electric cooperatives.

Comanche Electric Cooperative is also an active member of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). NRECA was organized in 1942 and is located in Washington, D.C. NRECA was organized to unite all of the rural electric systems under one banner to protect their interests and provide support to help them serve rural America. In addition, Comanche Electric Cooper-

ative is also a member of Touchstone Energy®, an alliance of more than 600 electric cooperatives in 45 states.

Comanche Electric Cooperative is a distribution cooperative, which means that we do not generate our power, but rather we purchase wholesale power and distribute it to our member-owners. In 1941, Comanche County Electric Cooperative and 10 other Texas cooperatives joined to create Brazos Electric Power Cooperative as a resource to help these member cooperatives provide affordable, reliable electricity to rural Texas consumers. Comanche Electric Cooperative, a founding member of Brazos Electric, continues to purchase its wholesale power requirements from Brazos Electric. By joining with other cooperatives, Brazos Electric aggregates buying power, and through economies of scale, it has a bigger market presence and achieves lower pricing than Comanche Electric Cooperative could achieve individually.

I drove to Waco this morning and spent the day with Kyle Minnix, manager of communications and key accounts for Brazos Electric. Kyle gave me a comprehensive tour of the Waco headquarters, and I had the privilege of meeting many of the employees.

COMANCHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Brazos Electric is one of 62 generation and transmission cooperatives in the United States that generate and transmit electricity, which it sells at wholesale rates to its member-owners. It owns and maintains more than 2,575 miles of transmission line and 330 substations, eight of which serve the member-owners of Comanche Electric Cooperative. Brazos Electric is the largest generation and transmission electric cooperative in Texas and the state's fifth-largest transmission provider. It serves 17 member distribution cooperatives in 68 counties. The mission statement of Brazos Electric is "to provide valued service to our members and customers by generating, procuring and transmitting reliable power at the lowest cost."

Brazos Electric Cooperative owns or controls seven generation plants. They are: Johnson County, Lake Whitney, R.W. Miller, Possum Kingdom, North Texas, San Miguel and Jack County. The Lake Whitney and Possum Kingdom plants are fueled by hydropower; the Jack County and Johnson County plants are combined-cycle plants fueled by natural gas; San Miguel is lignite-fueled; and the North Texas and R.W. Miller plants are fueled by natural gas. The Miller and North Texas plants are used

mostly to serve at peak usage times. Therefore, these plants do not run all the time. Brazos Electric has the rights to 50 percent of the capacity of the lignite-fired San Miguel plant, which is just south of San Antonio. At present, Brazos Electric, working in conjunction with another G&T cooperative, is jointly planning to construct and own a pulverized Powder River Basin (PRB) coal-fired generation plant with an anticipated online operating date of 2012.

In 1941, Brazos Electric signed its first wholesale contract with the Brazos River Authority for power from the Lake Possum Kingdom hydroelectric generation plant. In 1955, the Lake Whitney Power Plant came online when another contract was signed for more hydroelectric power. In 1958, the North Texas Power Plant Units 1 and 2 began operation with the Unit 3 coming online in 1963. The R.W. Miller Power Plant Unit 1 began operation in 1963, followed by Unit 2 in 1971 and Unit 3 in 1975. In 1983, the San Miguel Lignite Plant began operation, and in 1994, the R.W. Miller Power Plant Units 4 and 5 began operation. The most recent addition to the Brazos resource portfolio includes the Jack County and

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In the Transmission Operation Center, employees constantly monitor the board that networks all of Brazos EC's transmission lines.



**COMANCHE
ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE**

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YOUR "LOCAL PAGES"

This section of *Texas Co-op Power* is produced by Comanche EC each month to provide you with information about current events, special programs and other activities of the cooperative. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact Shirley at the Comanche office or at sdukes@ceca.coop.

COMANCHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

BRAZOS *continued from page 25*
Johnson County plants, which came online in 2006.

Brazos Electric uses a hedging strategy in buying natural gas and power that reduces the volatility in the wholesale power cost that is passed on to Comanche Electric Cooperative and the other member distribution cooperatives.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a hedge as protecting oneself financially. That means: (a) to buy or sell commodity futures as a protection against loss due to price fluctuations; and (b) to minimize the risk of a bet. A hedge in the energy industry is a decision to proactively lock in a price for a product in future periods. To assist in controlling the natural gas price volatility, Brazos Electric hedges 50 percent of its upcoming 30-month exposure with frontloading so that the closest three months may be hedged to 80 percent. Because of Brazos Electric's natural gas hedging program, the distribution cooperative members of Brazos saved \$15,422,680 and \$59,641,330 in 2004 and 2005, respectively, during periods of increased natural gas cost. Brazos Electric uses load and weather forecasts to assist in determining the amount of capacity needed to meet the total power requirement of the member cooperatives. The Brazos Electric Qualified Scheduling Entity (QSE) dispatches its daily power supply resources to optimally serve the members' load at the least cost consistent with prudent utility practices, including reliability considerations.

This requires careful planning to meet anticipated load and strategic analysis of the cost, sources and reliability of fuels used to produce electricity and the cost of purchases of energy when deploying various resources on the least-cost basis to serve the members' load. They also use market purchases from the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) to lower



Bryan Luker monitors the controls in the QSE Control Room.

members cost when savings can be achieved.

While in the control room, I was able to observe the employees and the equipment that they operate to monitor the usage and least-cost alternatives available for the member cooperatives. I was quite impressed with the knowledge and skill of these capable individuals.

During the course of my visit, I was also given a tour of the Transmission Operation Center, where all the transmission details are monitored and constantly observed and supervised. It, too, is a complex department with a capable crew of individuals who rely on their training and expertise to maintain reliable and uninterrupted service to Comanche Electric Cooperative and the other 16 cooperatives that Brazos Electric serves.

Brazos continually looks for ways to minimize dependency on a single fuel source to ensure that the electric energy it sells to Comanche Electric Cooperative is generated using a diverse range of fuels and technologies. Brazos periodically conducts power-supply studies to meet the estimated load growth of its members and considers a wide array of fuel supplies for such resources to reduce the risk associated with dependence on one fuel source. To achieve its mission statement to provide valued serv-

ice to its members and customers by generating, procuring and transmitting reliable power at the lowest cost, it is essential that the Brazos Electric board consider both fuel diversity and fuel efficiency of its resource portfolio. Both of these standards can significantly affect the cost of such power.

Brazos works closely with Comanche Electric Cooperative to ensure that your homes and businesses have the level of service that you require and have come to expect

and depend upon. For example, one of the first things that Clifton Karnei, executive vice president and general manager of Brazos Electric, told me when I arrived was that this very morning there had been a problem at the San Miguel Plant and it had shut down. But because of the dedication and the professional work ethic of the many individuals who run and maintain this facility, our members never even experienced a blink. Had Karnei not informed me of this happening, I would never have known any such shutdown had occurred. That is the professionalism that we all depend on, and the reason that when you flip a switch, light magically illuminates your home.

My friends at Brazos proudly say, "At Brazos Electric, we know who we are. We've been doing the same thing for more than 60 years—right here in Texas. We'd like to think that what we do has made this an even better place to live. As we continue to grow, we stick with things we know best. We protect our member-customers' interests by running a solid business based on sound financial practices. We scout the market for the best energy deals for our member cooperatives. We foster economic development in our members' communities. We're in it for the long haul, and we're proud to be part of this cooperative partnership."

Do You Have Vacation Plans in Your Future?

BY SHIRLEY DUKES

This month, *Texas Co-op Power* focuses on travel. I don't know about you, but that puts me in mind of vacation. My mind instantly turns to thoughts such as: "Will we take a vacation this year?" "Where will we go?" "Who will water the plants and feed the dog?" These are all relevant questions, to say the least. But the one I dread the most is: "How much will it cost me?" Taking a vacation can be costly, so when that time of year rolls around, I'm always looking for ways to cut costs without cutting short my family vacation time. One great way to save money for your vacation is to give your electric bill a vacation, too.

Each year, Comanche Electric Cooperative receives calls from consumers asking why their electric bill is so high when "We weren't even there for two weeks." They were gone for two weeks so their electric bill should be only half the normal size, right? Not necessarily! Your house does not shut down when you walk out the door. But there are many energy-saving tips that can dramatically affect your electric bill while you are out of town. So this month, we will be doing a little vacation check off.

First, let's start with your air conditioner. Contrary to popular belief, it actually costs less to cool off or reheat your home than it does to maintain the temperature while you are away. You can save on electricity if you shut off your air or heat when you are going to be away from home for four hours or more. So it makes sense to turn the unit off while you are on vacation. The exception to this would be if you were planning a winter vacation when pipes could freeze. If this were the case, you could consider lowering your thermostat to 55 degrees. Typically by doing this, you can save 10 to 30 percent on your heating costs.

Another exception would be if you have plants or animals that will remain in the house while you are gone. If this is the case, in the summer set the thermostat to 82 degrees and the fan setting on auto. There are other issues to consider when deciding whether to turn your unit off, and only you can be the judge as to whether it will be beneficial to you.

Next, we move to the water heater. Unless the dog is planning to take a hot bath daily or keep the laundry and



dishes done, there's really no need to leave it running at full capacity. In fact, there's no need to leave it on at all. It takes only about 30 minutes to reheat a 40-gallon water heater, which makes much more sense than having it cycle on and off the entire time you are gone.

That leftover chicken in the refrigerator and that last half gallon of milk are not going to look too appealing after a week or two away from home, so how about cleaning out the refrigerator and adjusting the setting while you are gone? According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the ideal temperature setting for a refrigerator is 35 degrees. But by raising the temperature of your refrigerator to 40 degrees, you can cut back on the number of times the compressor cycles on and off, thereby saving money. On these settings, you can cut up to 40 percent of the refrigerator's electric usage. And at a temperature of 40

degrees, the pickles and ketchup that you leave in there while you are away will still be cool enough that there will be no danger of spoilage or bacteria catching hold.

CECA Manager Ronnie Robinson reports that a 100-watt bulb burning 24 hours a day will use 2.4 kilowatts of power. Many people like to leave a light burning in the home while they are gone to give the illusion that someone is home. If this is the case, consider putting your lights on a

timer. Not only will this save you money, but it will also give even more of an impression of someone being home because the lights will be turning on and off at regular intervals. If this is not an option for you, consider having a neighbor or close friend adjust the lights daily for you. You should also consider installing compact fluorescent bulbs for inside and outside lights that will be on the longest. These use about 75 percent less power and

last up to 12,000 hours.

And last but not least, let's consider those "phantom loads." Your home has many appliances that use electricity, even when they are turned off. Some of the most common items are television sets, DVD players, VCRs, cable TV boxes, microwave ovens and computer equipment. These items can be unplugged while you are gone without any long-lasting effects. Unplugging these items or turning off the power strip that they are connected to not only can save you money, but in some instances can also reduce possible fire hazards during your absence.

Following these tips should reduce your electric bill during your vacation, thereby allowing you to spend a little more on your vacation and maybe even give you an excuse to splurge on at least one fun thing that you wanted to do but felt you couldn't afford. And that just makes good sense to all of us, doesn't it?

Stock Shows in Review



Katie Campbell displays her pig in the ring.



Rachel Clawson has fun in the pens with her pig and her puppy.



Rebecca Prater and her pig get "penned."



Sara Dukes shows off her pig to the judge.

**GOT STORY IDEAS?
SHARE THEM WITH US!**

If you have suggestions for articles you would like to see, we always welcome your input. Please send suggestions to sdukes@ceca.coop. We will try to run articles on as many suggested topics as space permits.