

Big Bend's 69th Annual Meeting

By Dale Anderson

The weather for this year's 69th Big Bend Electric Co-op annual meeting could not have been more perfect for a Saturday in late February. With temperatures in the high 50s, no wind and the sun shining brilliantly, members focused on their electric co-op.

Registered members received hats, pens and \$10 certificates for credit on their electric bills in appreciation for their attendance.

Youngsters who joined their families received safety books and color crayons. The children also guessed the amount of money in a light bulb bank. Karina Cervantes' guess came closest to the exact amount of \$22.87

Several displays were set up, including a wire display of the types used on Big Bend's system, information concerning the co-op's conser-



Above, Big Bend Electric Manager Jim Johnson helps young people draw names for prizes during the cooperative's annual meeting. Below, members catch up on the news at Basin City Elementary School.

vation programs, a Caring Neighbors display and a game for the youngsters to see if they could pick up a coin wearing lineman's gloves.

Representatives from Columbia Basin Health District of Othello offered a mini-health fair with a blood pressure check and information about healthier living. Diabetes screenings also were available.

Several people took advantage of a reflexology session from Wishing-U-Well reflexologist Colette Chase of Basin City. Bobbie Sue Hille of Ritzville won a one-hour reflexology session from Wishing-U-Well.

Dale Anderson, Big Bend manager of member services, introduced this year's Youth Tour winners, Jillian Pflugrath and Madison

Phillips, juniors at Ritzville High School. They will go to Washington, D.C., for a week in June with other co-op young people from around the United States.

Members were then introduced to the three scholarship recipients: Jessica Casper of Connell High School, Erika Rattray of Othello High School and Erik Hille of Ritzville High School.

The seniors read their scholarship essays. Each student will receive a \$500 scholarship for up to four years, for a maximum of \$2,000.

President Lyle Holt started the annual meeting by recognizing Director Ron Baumann, who died in September.

"Although he had been a board member for a short time, he contributed a lot to the board meetings," Holt said. "We are sad about his passing and we miss having him on our board."

Holt, in his third and final year as president of the co-op, thanked members and fellow directors for their support.

"Labor and materials have posed a challenge for us," Holt said, speaking about the co-op. "The shortage of skilled labor in the region has changed our recruiting methods and our use of personnel. Material costs





Above, Bobbie Sue Hille relaxes with a foot reflexology treatment from Collette Chase of Wishing-U-Well. Below, Big Bend youth tour representatives Jillian Pflugrath, left, and Madison Phillips were introduced to members.

continue to escalate. Some items have tripled in cost in just a few years.

“Part of the reason for spending more is because of the continued growth. The number of consumers we serve grew by about 2 percent last year. Construction, maintenance and service calls have also increased in the last year, making for a very busy 2007.”

Holt told members he is pleased the board returned \$1.9 million in capital credits in February.

“Your board believes it is important to follow cooperative principles by continuing to return capital credits,” he said. “This is the 30th consecutive year Big Bend Electric has paid capital credits, with payments during those years totaling \$18.6 million. This is a positive sign the co-op is in sound financial condition.”

Holt said there will not be a rate increase this year

unless some unforeseen event occurs. He added that Big Bend’s rates are among the lowest nationwide.

He thanked employees for their hard work and dedication, making Big Bend Electric financially strong.

Manager Jim Johnson talked about the future of electricity in our region, post 2011. The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), Big Bend’s sole provider, will not be able to supply the co-op with all of its electricity needs at that time.

Because of regional growth, Big Bend must eventually buy market-based electricity at higher prices to fill the gap between the cost-based power from BPA and our consumers’ total energy needs.

The co-op must evaluate power supply options to fill the gap for a 20-year time frame.

Big Bend is not the only utility facing this issue. The co-op has joined 40 Northwest utilities to study power supply options.



Big Bend ultimately may be required to comply with a renewable portfolio standard or buy power from renewable resources. Unfortunately for the co-op and its members, the state does not now consider hydro to be renewable.

Johnson thanked members affected by the winter outages for their understanding and patience. Big Bend was fortunate it didn’t have as many problems as some utilities did.

“I appreciate the hard work that all of our employees do to serve our members,” said Johnson. “Finally, thank you to our board of directors for the many hours of time they spend deliberating over complex issues. I appreciate very much the opportunity to be the manager of your co-op, and I thank you all for attending today.”

Annie Smart, Caring Neighbors board member, thanked members for their donations to help schools, fire and ambulance districts, non-profit organizations, food banks and municipalities with projects.

Annie thanked fellow Caring Neighbors board members Don Butcher of Othello, Stephanie Coon of Benge, Kay Corbin of Pasco and Beth Schafer of Connell.

Lucky members won more than 40 door prizes donated by vendors, suppliers and Big Bend Electric Cooperative, as well as a dozen prizes for youngsters.

Following the meeting, co-op members and guests were treated to a meal prepared by Nancy Meise of Washtucna.

Election results were announced during lunch, with incumbent directors all winning unopposed elections: Mel Kagele, District 1; Dennis Swinger Sr., District 2; and Daniel Bauermeister, District 3.

In the District 1 election for an unexpired two-year term, Dan Hille defeated Grant Miller.

After lunch, Lineman Carl True presented an electrical safety demonstration. He performed the arcs and sparks, while Dale Anderson pointed out potential safety hazards. ■