

# country living

FOR MEMBERS OF EAST CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



## CEO Announces Retirement After 20 Years

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After two decades at the helm, East Central Electric Cooperative CEO Tim Smith announced plans to retire during the 2024 Annual Meeting. Smith's tenure has been marked by improvements in safety, advancements in reliability, and an expansion in services the co-op is able to provide. For Smith, the role of CEO is defined by one overarching responsibility—serving the co-op's member.



2004



2024

storms, policy impacts in our industry, an economic crisis, we do what's right by the members no matter what."

The biggest challenges of Smith's tenure have all been wired to this one energizing aim.

How do we improve our system (be it infrastructure or workflow) to best serve our members?

"Decisions about how we change out equipment, the proper amount of funds needed to maintain our Right-of-Way, systematic pole inspections, all of those impact our members' reliability and service," Smith said. "Making headway on the challenges we faced took time, education, and determination. It wasn't overnight."

In a series of incremental wins, two large achievements stick out.

The first was the facility modernization in 2010 followed by a facility expansion in 2021.

### SERVING OUR MEMBER AND COMMUNITIES

For 20 years, Smith has been a steadfast proponent of member service, and for good reason. The cooperative is owned and governed by the people it serves.

"The member is what makes the cooperative," Smith said. "They are the owners. They're the folks we work for every day."

In finances, in performance metrics, in every interaction with the board and senior staff, Smith keeps the best interest of the members paramount.

"Leadership in this context is about finding the balance in how you take care of the member, answer to the Board of Trustees, and work with all the great employees we have, to keep all of that going in the right direction," Smith said. "No matter what we are facing:

## Annual Meeting Turnout and Election Results

Thank you to all the co-op members who attended Annual Meeting Thursday, July 25.

1,374 members registered in attendance at the drive-thru or in-person events. This attendance exceeded the quorum requirement to conduct business.

Board Members Lowell Hobbs and Jay Emerson were re-elected to their offices. The proposed bylaw change passed 1,308 to 31 and went into effect immediately. The approved changes relate to qualifications to serve on the board of trustees. These include an extension of the minimum membership requirement from one year to five years, and a clause allowing the board to remove a trustee who no longer meets the qualifications to serve as a trustee.



Tim Smith, quite a common name for a very uncommon man.

My phone rang early one morning in 2005. The caller said, “This is Tim Smith from East Central Electric, and your name has been offered as a director position at East Central Electric. The Board would like to interview you Tuesday morning at 10 a.m. Will that work for you?”

That is how my relationship with Tim started. I survived the interview with a call a couple days later to inform me that the Board had accepted me to continue the term of Mr. June Cumby who had retired after honorably serving 30 years on the Board. I knew he was a good man and admired by all the ECE members. Now 19 years later I have an even deeper respect for him and the others who have set the foundation of ECE. In 2008 I was elected Vice Chairman, and then in 2011 elected as Chairman of the Board. At that point I began to work closely with Tim and experienced his ideas to provide reliable and reasonable electric power to all our co-op members. He continues that passion and has led not only East Central Electric Co-op, but his efforts have been productive for Oklahoma and the National Rural Electric Co-ops, a level of success unprecedented.

Some of the local statistics are: meters served increased to over 37,000 up by over 7,000; miles of line energized increased just short of 600 to 6,445; operating revenue almost tripled to just over \$90 million; total utility plant has gone from \$100 million to over \$360 million. We all know Tim has not accomplished all this without the help of 106 employees (up 26) and the support of the Board

and the members of East Central Electric Co-op. We all own the same amount of shares in a successful electric provider and its subsidiaries.

In 2010 we remodeled the 1978 model of our offices without a rate increase to our members. Then in 2022 we added much needed space and improved our warehouse and parking arrangement all while embarking on providing broadband to every member of ECE that wanted high speed internet. Our first member was installed in 2019 and was available to all by July, 2023. We are now helping some communities that are not our ECE members but who do not have adequate broadband. This build out to those areas will continue ‘til all in our footprint have the opportunity to have high speed internet fiber in the home.

Tim’s recent announcement of his upcoming retirement brought tears to my eyes. How could this happen when all is progressing so well and we have experienced so many benefits under his leadership. I soon decided to not cry over his departure but to enjoy and reflect on all the good life we have enjoyed together. The good part of the timing is the fact that we are moving along in good shape. We have no debacles or blockades to keep us from going ahead with the plans already in place.

The Board is busy seeking our next CEO, and we expect it to be a smooth and successful transition. I save a lot of “one liners” that I find helpful in my life and maybe you will get some good thoughts from them as well. I don’t know the authors so I cannot give them credit for their savvy, but many of these remind me of Tim:

Lowell Hobbs, District 2  
President

Larry Harvey, District 1  
Vice President

Dwight Luther, District 7  
Secretary / Treasurer

Jim Hall, District 6  
Assistant Sec. / Treasurer

Max Shoemake, District 3

Michael Vernon, District 4

Jay Emerson, District 5

- Give every day the chance to become the most beautiful day of your life.
- Always laugh when you can. It is cheap medicine.
- Success breeds confidence but confidence also breeds success.
- People demand freedom of speech to make up for the freedom of thought which they avoid.
- It’s character not circumstances that make the man.
- Appreciation is a wonderful thing; it makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.
- Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.
- Tomorrow’s life is too late. Live today.
- We are often afforded the luxury of opinion without the discomfort of thought.
- You have absolute control over but one thing, and that is your thoughts. This is the most significant and inspiring of all facts known to man.

Tim is patient and doesn’t get ahead of his staff or the Board. Tim is not looking for power or position, he is passionate about his work and the work of his associates. His personality makes him likeable to everyone. He is a man of principles and his success has not swelled his ego. Tim and his wife Tammie are a Christian couple, supporting each other in all they do. Always take the high road. Tim is that kind of guy!

# Retirement

## Continued from Cover

“We gave our employees a workplace that allowed them to excel in their jobs,” Smith said.

The latest was the roll-out of high-speed fiber internet to all co-op members, providing a needed resource to rural communities and improving system reliability with smart grid technologies.

“This will benefit our membership for years to come and enable us to provide even more reliable electric service,” Smith said.

## A CAREER OF SERVICE

Prior to accepting the role at ECE, Smith worked for 14 years as a human resources manager and then a decade as the assistant general manager of Ouachita Electric Cooperative in Arkansas.

While at ECE, Smith served on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association board for 12 years, shaping policies and initiatives that advanced

the cooperative movement and brought broadband internet to rural Oklahoma.

At the Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives (OAEC), Smith held numerous office positions and served on committees to help guide statewide projects.

Smith has also been involved in the Cooperative Broadband Coalition, the Okmulgee Area Development Corporation Board, and has served as an alternate trustee for ECE’s Generation and Transmission Cooperative partners, KAMO Power and Western Farmers Electric Cooperative.

For all of these efforts, Smith was awarded the Oklahoma Rural Electric Hall of Fame Award by OAEC in April.

## WHAT COMES NEXT

“There are exciting things coming in our industry,” Smith said. “New technologies and new innovative ways to provide electric services. There will be new energy saving programs that will enable people to make improvements to their homes and save on energy costs. There will be more distributed energy throughout our system.”

“The next leader is going to be fortunate to be a part of these transitions and continue to make lives better for our membership. There are exciting times ahead.”

The choice of the next CEO belongs to the ECE Board of Trustees, made up of co-op members who have been elected by the membership.

“Our goal is to identify a dynamic leader who will not only uphold the cooperative’s core values and commitment to serve our members but will also steer us towards a future defined by innovation and sustainability,” Board President Lowell Hobbs said. “We are dedicated to finding an individual who possesses the vision, experience, and passion necessary to lead us into the next chapter of our journey.”

Applications for the position will be accepted through September 17, and the Board of Trustees hopes to announce their selection in November.

There will be a two-month transition period with the new CEO before Smith exits the co-op in January 2025.

# Meet Our Next Level Team: Billing



Attention to detail and proactive problem-solving are what set East Central Electric Cooperative’s billing department apart from other utilities. While running 12 different billing cycles every month, our billing team also offers exceptional service helping members choose the best rate and billing schedule for their needs, identifying meter malfunctions as they occur, and promptly resolving billing concerns. Our billing department serves as the first link in a chain of services available to co-op members to help them regain the feeling that they have power over their power. The dedication and expertise of the billing team safeguards the cooperative’s member-first reputation and financial stability.

“I find my job rewarding because it’s our department that members count on to get an accurate bill, and when there are issues it’s our team that fixes it. Something members don’t know is that nearly every call, email, or visit to the office turns into a service order that lands on the desk of someone in Billing. It’s awesome to me that we get to handle that!”

- KIERSTEN BEEN, ASSISTANT BILLING SUPERVISOR

# Annual Meeting Prize Winners



Thank you for participating in your 2024 Annual Meeting. Congratulations to our prize winners!

Grand Prize \$1,000:

Jim Thomas, Mounds

One Year of 1GB ecoLINK:

Caleb Fairchild, Glenpool

\$500:

Dean Hampton, Beggs  
Tony Nichols, Council Hill

Three Months of 1GB ecoLINK:

Jimmy Moore, Depew  
James Delmer, Glenpool  
Kimberlee Ledbetter, Muskogee  
Jamie Brooks, Checotah

One Month of 1GB ecoLINK:

Craig Alpers, Beggs  
Marie Gibson, Warner  
Thomas R Brown II, Haskell  
Mitchell Martin, Council Hill  
James Thomas, Boynton  
Philip G Ward, Okmulgee  
Janette Ringer, Morris  
Rose Ramsey, Okemah  
Ron Rose, Okmulgee  
Pearlie Daniels, Okmulgee

\$100:

John Duncan, Morris  
Dennis Dial, Bristow  
Dually Bertholf, Muskogee  
Davis & Davis Oil, Morris  
Dolores Hill, Kellyville  
Preston RWD #3  
Cynthia Webster, Preston  
Kenneth Weikel, Beggs  
Derrell Cox, Bixby  
Leslie Johnston, Beggs  
Sean McSorley, Henryetta  
Mandy Peters, Henryetta  
Mark Duvall, Hitchita  
Garrett Stobaugh, Muskogee  
Sherry Martin, Okmulgee  
Richard Ross, Mounds  
First Baptist Church Sapulpa  
Otto Mackey, Okemah  
Lane Scism, Morris  
Gigi Marie Avery, Kellyville  
Lee Ritch, Morris  
Stonebluff Senior Citizens Center  
Ricky Pearson, Morris  
Chastity Billy, Henryetta  
Steven Arnold, Morris  
James Phillips, Okmulgee  
Mary Burrow, Morris  
Doug Penn, Okmulgee  
Diana Elam, Morris  
David Horn, Okmulgee  
Elizabeth Baker, Sapulpa  
Dan M Smith II, Beggs  
Eddie Lee, Beggs  
Matt Watkins, Bristow  
Mary Sullivan, Henryetta  
Daniel Miller, Okmulgee  
Donald Stout, Muskogee  
Linda Raney, Okemah  
Rodney Hendricks, Bristow  
Tanya Milam, Beggs  
Tom Dooley, Okmulgee  
Sunrise Cemetery Assoc.  
Brenda Cooksey, Okmulgee  
William Crowell, Bixby  
Jamie McCoy, Checotah  
Daryl Contreras, Okmulgee  
Tiffany Lee, Morris  
Joel Franks, Okemah  
Steve Jackson, Morris  
Larry Terry, Haskell

Jason Fox, Henryetta  
Rebecca Thomas, Muskogee  
Dennis Hladik, Checotah  
Brandie Bell, Mounds  
Heather Earnest, Okmulgee  
Homer Neasby, Mounds  
Pamela Sharit, Beggs  
Brad Buffum, Checotah  
Sunny Moreno, Henryetta  
Emmitt Sconyers, Bristow

\$100 Stay to Win Bill Credit:

Bobby Gormly, Okemah  
Daniel Brinsfield, Checotah

Cool Car Contest \$50 Bill Credit:

Michelle Fox, Bixby



HONORABLE MENTIONS



Recipe Contest \$25 Bill Credit:

Jennifer Hudson, Glenpool  
Recipe: Chocolate Eclair  
Get it in the 2028  
Member Cookbook

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