

Why Ruralite?

As a member-owner, you must be informed. That is why your utility provides this magazine. By practicing the co-op principles, your utility is saving you money.

By Pam Blair

Back in the early 1950s, managers at rural electric cooperatives in the Northwest faced a dilemma: How could they provide the information their member-owners needed to make sound decisions about their cooperatives, yet do so in a cost-effective manner?

They found the solution in the cooperative spirit: pooling their resources.

But it wasn't easy. In 1954, Oregon co-ops had only about 30,000 members—"hardly enough to cover a minimum printing bill, let alone any kind of overhead expense," longtime Klickitat PUD Manager Emmet Clouse wrote in 1968.

Nevertheless, the group believed a publication was needed to give rural electrification a unified voice in the region and keep consumers informed. A committee was formed to work on a solution.

Recognizing their numbers were too few for individual magazines, Idaho and Washington co-ops said they would join if the publication would serve them, too.

Rural electric magazines had been successful in the South and Midwest. However, each of those publications

served a single state, with their minimum circulation being 70,000. Most had circulations of 125,000 to 225,000.

Undeterred in their efforts to put together a regional magazine for a much smaller number of members, the committee continued to plug away, working five years to get a publication started.

They turned to Hank Alderman, a former newspaperman and Bonneville Power Administration employee, for help. With Alderman leading the way, a Northwest publication for rural electric cooperatives was launched.

Alderman remained publisher for 18 years, until his death in 1972.

In the Beginning

The forerunner of Ruralite magazine—Northwest Rural Electric News—was first published 53 years ago, in June 1954, by the Oregon statewide association.

The eight-page tabloid-sized paper also was distributed through subscriptions to cooperatives in Washington and Idaho. About a dozen electric systems with an estimated 20,000 consumers subscribed that first year.

Production of the newspaper was as modest as the circulation. Alderman and

his wife, Hazel, produced the first few issues from the kitchen table of their Portland, Oregon, home.

In the first issue, Alderman explained that the more members knew about their cooperative's affairs, the more value they would get from it.

The purpose of the paper "will be to keep you informed of cooperative matters, of the newer and better ways to use your electric power supply, and to enable you to participate more fully as individuals in the universal assumption of responsibility which we all have for keeping our region, our neighbors and ourselves supplied with low-cost electric energy," Alderman wrote.

Ruralite magazine serves the same mission today.

Growth Spawns Change

As interest and support from electric utilities in the region increased, the new enterprise prospered.

When the operation broke even the first year, the Oregon association surrendered its ownership of the paper to a new, nonprofit association it helped form: Ruralite Services.

Six months after its birth, the publication became

known as Northwest Ruralite. The name Ruralite was inspired by an Idaho co-op, Northern Lights, which had used it for its own newsletter—a publication it abandoned to subscribe to the new magazine.

As the number of readers, utilities and states covered increased, the Aldermans hired people to help them produce the paper, and the operation moved to new facilities, eventually settling in Forest Grove, Oregon.

In mid-1973, the magazine became known simply as Ruralite. By that time, the publication had changed from an eight-page newspaper to a 32-page magazine that served more than 30 utilities and some 100,000 consumers.

The member utilities no longer were confined to rural electric cooperatives. PUDs in Oregon and Washington also had joined the Ruralite family.

Once limited to two colors, it now features full-color photography.

In fall 1998, the statewide organization in Arizona—Grand Canyon State Electric Cooperative Association—and several of its members decided to work with Ruralite



Services to produce a satellite publication: Currents magazine.

By sharing material, Ruralite and Currents save money for everyone.

In 2004, the country's newest electric co-op, Kauai Island Utility Cooperative in Hawaii, joined the Ruralite family and began its own magazine.

Today, Ruralite Services works with 54 utilities headquartered in eight states, with a total circulation topping 397,000.

What's Inside

Ruralite is designed to be flexible. Each utility can use a

cover photo provided by Ruralite, or one of their own choosing. The back page is available for utilities to communicate important messages to their members.

Six inside pages also are available for each utility's use. Some use two of those pages to feature a member with an interesting story, job or hobby. The other four pages may be used to explain special programs the utility offers, update consumers on local happenings or announce upcoming meetings.

While those eight pages may vary from utility to utility, the other pages are the same in all magazine editions.

In those "common" pages, readers are given information about electrical safety, conservation, and new products or ways of doing things. They also are kept up-to-date on developments in the power industry.

While those types of stories are central to the mission of the magazine, several articles each month focus on the interesting people, places

and events throughout the territory served by Ruralite.

Among the regular features are Side Roads, In the Kitchen, At Home, Rural Mailbox, Classifieds and Parting Shot.

Economical Communications

Printing and mailing of the magazine has an average cost about equal to a first-class postage stamp.

The magazine serves as the legal means of notification for the utilities' programs, policies and practices, and can be used to deliver annual reports, notify members of meetings, profile candidates for board positions and provide other information that otherwise would have to be mailed.

While some of that material could be mailed independently, the cost of preparing, printing and mailing it would exceed the cost of the magazine—and many people probably would discard it before even looking at it.

By cooperating with one another, utilities in the region have made Ruralite the solution to keeping members informed, connected to their utility and each other, and entertained. ■

Utilities Served By Ruralite

Fifty-four electric utilities based in Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon and Washington work with Ruralite Services to provide a magazine to their customers. Those utilities also serve people in small portions of Montana, New Mexico, Utah and British Columbia. The stars on the maps show the headquarters of those utilities, whose names are listed to the right.



ALASKA

Alaska Village Electric, Anchorage; Barrow Utilities & Electric, Barrow; Copper Valley Electric Assn., Glennallen; Golden Valley Electric, Fairbanks; Kotzebue Electric Assn., Kotzebue; Nushagak Cooperative, Dillingham

ARIZONA

Duncan Valley Electric, Duncan; Electrical District No. 2, Coolidge; Graham County Electric, Pima; Grand Canyon State Electric Cooperative Assn., Phoenix; Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Co-op, Willcox

CALIFORNIA

Anza Electric Co-op, Anza; Lassen Municipal Utility District, Susanville; Plumas-Sierra REC, Portola; Surprise Valley Electrification Corp., Alturas

HAWAII

Kauai Island Utility Co-op, Lihue

IDAHO

Clearwater Power Co., Lewiston; Idaho County Light & Power, Grangeville; Lost River Electric Co-op, Mackay; Northern Lights, Inc., Sagle; Raft River Electric Co-op, Malta; Salmon River Electric Co-op, Challis; United Electric Co-op, Heyburn

NEVADA

Valley Electric Assn., Pahrump; Mt. Wheeler Power, Ely; Wells Rural Electric Co., Wells; Lincoln County Power District No. 1, Pioche.

OREGON

Blachly-Lane Electric, Eugene; Central Electric Co-op, Redmond; Columbia Basin Electric Co-op, Heppner; Columbia Power Co-op, Monument; Consumers Power, Inc., Philomath; Coos-Curry Electric Co-op, Port Orford; Douglas Electric Co-op, Roseburg; Harney Electric Co-op, Burns; Hood River Electric Co-op, Odell; Lane Electric Co-op, Eugene; Midstate Electric Co-op, LaPine; Northern Wasco PUD, The Dalles; Oregon Trail Electric, Baker City; Tillamook PUD, Tillamook; Umatilla Electric Co-op, Hermiston; Wasco Electric Co-op, The Dalles; West Oregon Electric, Vernonia

WASHINGTON

Benton REA, Prosser; Big Bend REA, Ritzville; Columbia Rural Electric Assn., Dayton; Kittitas County PUD, Ellensburg; Klickitat County PUD, Goldendale; Nespelem Valley Electric, Nespelem; Ohop Mutual Light Co., Eatonville; Okanogan County Electric, Winthrop; Parkland Light & Water Co., Tacoma; Tanner Electric Co-op, North Bend