

A Heart-and-Soul Commitment

During the worst of times, strong community ties come to the forefront for a publicly owned utility

By Pam Blair

Community can be as simple as people living in a common area—or as emotionally complicated as knowing the people around you and feeling their pain in the midst of an unthinkable tragedy.

Following the mass shooting at Umpqua Community College in October, the staff at Douglas Electric Cooperative lived the latter. Employees at the utility based in Roseburg, Oregon, are connected through friends and neighbors to the nine students killed, the many others injured and the victims' families.

“While we have our share of crew

members coaching sports teams and staff involved in many civic activities, the horrific massacre brought everyone together for one cause,” says Todd Munsey, member services director of Douglas Electric.

Pacific Power Regional Business Manager Diana Knous organized a communitywide effort to welcome students, faculty and staff back to campus.

“Our line crews and staff jumped at the opportunity to line both sides of Umpqua College Road with line trucks and American flags,” says Todd. “Alongside Pacific Power, Avista, Umpqua Dairy and many, many others, Douglas Electric Cooperative was proudly represented.

“One adjunct professor, the wife of a DEC employee, said it was difficult to drive and wave through the tears. She was fortunate to have not been on campus the day of the shooting. A student and wife of one of our linemen, who was on campus that day, found it too difficult to return so soon. Since many more students returned on Tuesday, the decision was made to go out again to join an even larger crowd the following morning.”

The staff also shared a box filled with Love Rocks created by Ruralite staff.

The small stones decorated with colorful bits of fabric and paint have been used to express support and buoy spirits since late 2013. They were created by grieving parents to commemorate the lives of their two daughters, who died in a tragic accident in Forest Grove, Oregon.

“Many found their way into the hands of employees, members, friends, students and a permanent home on the UCC campus itself,” Todd says. “Love certainly knows no bounds, but it is incredible to witness how a little rock with a heart on it can melt people’s hearts. There are many melting hearts in Roseburg thanks to our friends at Ruralite.”

As integral parts of the communities they serve, publicly owned utilities and the employees who work there provide

not only emotional but economic support. Here are ways others give back.

Alaska Village Electric Cooperative, Anchorage, Alaska. AVEC provides donations to spring and fall cleanups, community events and festivals.

Barrow Utilities and Electric Cooperative Inc., Barrow, Alaska. BUECI donates \$70,000 a year to local organizations and individuals to support athletic, scholastic, cultural and safety activities.

Big Bend Electric Cooperative, Ritzville, Washington. The Caring Neighbors program has benefited schools, ambulance, fire, police, food banks and community organizations that help youth, seniors and those in need.

Blachly-Lane Electric Cooperative, Junction City, Oregon. Employees help homeless girls with bus tokens, haircuts, personal hygiene essentials and notes of encouragement, and raise money to help women and girls reach their potential.

Central Electric Cooperative, Redmond, Oregon. Employees participated in the United Way Days of Caring at the BrightSide Animal Center; collected more than 321 cans and 98 boxes of food; and donated money to more than 50 community organizations.

Clatskanie PUD, Clatskanie, Oregon. Employees and directors collected 920 pounds of food and \$2,500 in donations for local food banks. Through the Share Smiles by Giving project, employees donate toys for Christmas. Tickets to a concert were raffled to raise money for the PUD’s energy assistance program.

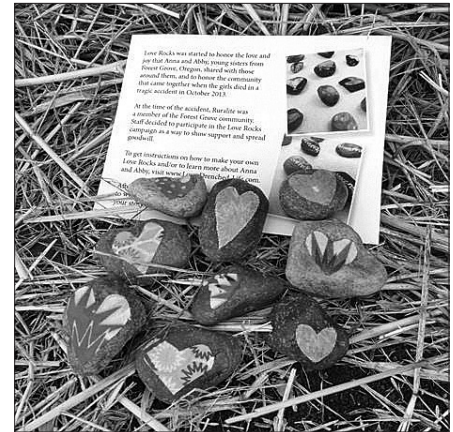
Consumers Power Inc., Philomath, Oregon. CPI donated its line truck and the labor of two employees to unload and place a propane generator at the Red Cross Alsea Community Emergency Shelter.

Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative, Port Orford, Oregon. Employees helped a shelter for battered and abused women and children, at AARP income tax filing events, an animal shelter and boat races.



United Electric Cooperative Inc. employees and members collect winter apparel to give to local children on a Mitten Tree in the Heyburn, Idaho, office.

Photo courtesy of United Electric Cooperative



Douglas Electric Cooperative line trucks joined others to welcome students back to class a week after a mass shooting. Above, Love Rocks were placed at the Umpqua Community College memorial.

Photos by Bob Ferguson and Todd Munsey

Golden Valley Electric Association, Fairbanks, Alaska. Employees donated 10 boxes of food and filled an SUV and truck full of gifts, including a mountain bike, for an adopted family. Employees also raised \$53,995 for United Way.

Klickitat PUD, Goldendale, Washington. Through Operation Warm Heart—a year-round emergency energy assistance program funded by gifts from KPUD customers—the PUD has given more than \$250,000 during the past decade to help hundreds of families in financial need.

Kotzebue Electric Association, Kotzebue, Alaska. KEA sponsors the Boys and Girls Club and a Little League team, the KEA Powerhouse. Power Plant Foreman Claude Wilson is involved with the Kotzebue Racing Association, and Project Engineer Matt Bergan was race marshal for the Kobuk 440 dog sled race.

Lassen Municipal Utility District, Susanville, California. LMUD helped the Lassen High Football Boosters Club replace a 35-year-old scoreboard with a state-of-the-art LED scoreboard, which will result in a significant energy savings.

Midstate Electric Cooperative, La Pine,

Oregon. Employees gave 34 pints in Red Cross blood drives at the co-op, and donated 498 pounds of food to the local food pantry. The co-op joined with community organizations to present a health fair at the annual meeting, which was attended by more than 1,000 members.

Northern Lights Inc., Sagle, Idaho. NLI's Community Trust provides funds from Operation Round Up—a program that allows members to make a tax-deductible donation by rounding up their monthly power bill to the next dollar—to local food banks along with hundreds of seed packets so people can grow their own produce.

Northern Wasco County PUD, The Dalles, Oregon. NWCPUD awarded \$46,442 in economic development grants during 2015 and matched customer donations to its Neighbor to Neighbor energy assistance program in the amount of \$4,576 in the past 12 months.

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative, Baker City, Oregon. Employees cook and serve food at the senior shelter and coordinate community improvement projects, which include installing donated exercise equipment along a pathway in Baker City.

Surprise Valley Electric, Alturas, California. SVE crews erect and decorate several Christmas trees, and staff donates food during the Christmas season and prepares gift baskets for needy families.

Tanner Electric Cooperative, North Bend, Washington. TEC offers three high school scholarships to graduating seniors; one \$4,000 scholarship to an accredited lineman college; one annual scholarship to the NRECA Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.; and staff time and equipment to put up banners and decorations for community events.

Tillamook PUD, Tillamook, Oregon. The Tillamook PUD Family & Friends Relay For Life team raised \$9,154 this year. During the past 16 years, PUD employees and families have raised nearly \$84,000 for cancer research, education, advocacy and patient services.

United Electric Cooperative Inc., Heyburn, Idaho. UEC hosts a food drive to benefit local food banks and shelters. Last year, employees bought necessities for several retirement homes at Christmas.

Wasco Electric Cooperative, The Dalles, Oregon. WEC sponsors students to national and regional youth programs; buys 4-H animals at county fairs; supports local scholarship programs; provides community economic grants totaling \$7,500; and donates empty water bottles to the local animal shelter to help buy needed materials. ■