

The Value of Electricity Continues To Shine

HOW MANY OF US REMEMBER DROPPING INTO TRI-COUNTY ELECTRIC Cooperative's office with our parents and grandparents to pay the "light" bill? Whether you do that in person, by mail or online today, paying your monthly bill does a lot more than just keep the lights on.

Electricity keeps us connected to our modern world. Consider all the necessities and conveniences you enjoy in part because of power lines running to the electric meter outside your home.

Count up your TVs, computers, printers, gaming consoles, music and video players, and other devices. Whether they get used every day or just occasionally, the electricity that keeps them working comes from Tri-County EC.

You use electricity to run all these devices, heat the stove, run the AC and get hot water—and we still keep the lights on. The good news is, even as we rely more on electricity, it's still a bargain, especially compared to other things we pay for regularly.

Over the past 10 years, the cost of medical care, residential rental rates and education have increased at rates of 3% or more per year. Butter, meat and egg costs have gone up by more than 2% annually, and even bread costs have risen better than a half point on average per year.

Electricity costs have gone up a bit too (about 1% a year), but co-ops across the country report a decline in average residential use per household since 2010. That means we're doing more things with less energy. Kilowatt-hour use per household has dropped by 8% over the past 10 years.

When it comes to value, electricity is a clear winner, and we're always looking for ways to work with you to make it even better. That's why Tri-County EC encourages energy efficiency through such items as Energy Star-certified appliances and promotes technology designed to give members more control over their electricity use.

Energy performance dashboards, smart thermostats and power strips, and appliance settings that shift most water heating, laundry and dishwashing outside of peak rate periods help reduce the co-op's overall power demand. These tools also give you opportunities to control or even trim your monthly utility bills. 800857210

That's good for family budgets. And it's going to become even more important as digital devices and internet-connected technologies become even more prevalent in

our lives. The average American home has dozens of Wi-Fi-connected devices that depend on stable electricity. That's why your home depends on Tri-County EC for more than the power that keeps the lights on.

We're always working to provide service that's reliable, affordable and increasingly valuable to our members—you, your family and your neighbors.



Have you looked around your kitchen lately? In addition to the coffee maker, toaster, microwave and electric skillet, a lot of us have added several other modern small appliances.

If you've got a craft nook or workshop, the power tools and machines you use to cut and shape your projects are either plugged into or recharged from the outlets connecting your household wiring to your electric co-op.

Celebrate National Cut Your Energy Costs Day

IF YOU RESOLVED TO SPEND LESS AND SAVE MORE IN 2020, CUTTING BACK ON A FEW regular expenses is a great place to start. January 10 is National Cut Your Energy Costs Day, so we've rounded up a few tips to help you trim your utility bills without making major lifestyle changes. 8003443201

1. Cut heating and cooling costs.

We spend a great deal of energy heating our homes during the winter and keeping them cool in the summer, but are we really doing our best to minimize the cost of our comfort? A programmable thermostat can be a lifesaver, allowing you to adjust the temperature when you're out of the house or sleeping. There's no reason

to blast the heat when everyone is at work, and it's doubtful that you need to sleep with the hot air on high. So program your schedule into your thermostat, and it'll do all the work for you.

2. Watch out for energy-draining appliances.

Big appliances like refrigerators, washers and dryers consume a lot of energy, so the next time you replace one of these appliances, upgrade to an energy-efficient Energy Star-certified model.



These are designed to use much less energy than their older counterparts and often end up paying for themselves in savings over time. Keep these appliances clean and well maintained to ensure optimal performance and efficiency.

3. Pull the plug.

As we continue to be more and more "plugged in," it should come as no surprise that a greater proportion of our energy goes toward keeping our devices charged and running. To keep costs reasonable, plug electronics into a power strip and turn it off when they're not in use. This cuts off "phantom" usage and can save you a bundle. Some newer power strips even include an automatic shut-off feature for an added level of convenience, so there's no excuse for wasted energy.

4. Hit the lights.

As always, turn off the lights when leaving a room. You can also swap out light-bulbs to increase your home's energy efficiency. Replace incandescent bulbs with LED versions for an easy and affordable way to save on electricity. Not only do LEDs last significantly longer, they also require much less energy.

5. Start with a simple home assessment.

Interested to know how your home's energy use compares to similar homes? Check out Energy Star's Home Energy Yardstick at energystar.gov to learn how much of your home's energy use is related to heating and cooling versus other everyday applications like appliance use, lighting and hot water.



Space Heaters Need Space

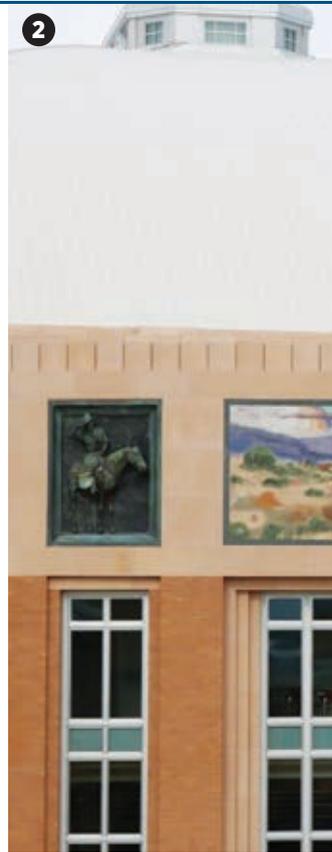
LIKE ANY ELECTRICAL APPLIANCE, PERSONAL space heaters need their space.

It's especially important to position space heaters at least 3 feet away from anything that could catch on fire. Although the handy appliances come with lots of safety features nowadays, it's still up to you to make sure they don't get close enough to be a danger.

Here's how important that is: The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that more than 25,000 residential fires every year are associated with the use of space heaters, causing more than 300 deaths.

To use a space heater safely, use it wisely. **Follow these tips for smart use:**

- ▶ Stick with space heaters that carry the mark of UL or another nationally recognized testing laboratory. Those models will offer the most current safety features.
- ▶ Keep all objects, bedding, people and pets at least 3 feet away from the space heater.
- ▶ Replace your space heater if it seems to short out or if its electrical cord is frayed or otherwise damaged.
- ▶ Look for safety features such as automatic shut-off that trips if the device tips over.
- ▶ Place your heater on the floor, not on a stand or a desk, where it could get knocked over.
- ▶ Choose a space heater with a thermostat to avoid overheating the room.
- ▶ Oversized heaters waste energy. Buy the correct size heater for the room.



Buckeye Blake

Artist knows the power of connection

BY BOB BUCKEL, COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA REPRESENTATIVE

“A PLACE, A LANDSCAPE, ALMOST HAS AN AURA. YOU CAN FEEL it—well, some people can—and if you can, then you try to paint that.

“It’s almost like a current—an electrical current.”

James “Buckeye” Blake knows a thing or two about the emotional charge created when an artist connects with a viewer.

Blake’s studio, just across the driveway from his home in western Parker County, is surrounded by cutting-horse ranches and powered by Tri-County Electric Cooperative. An elaborate weather vane crowns the tin roof; there’s a cow skull nailed to the wall beside the screened-in porch, and the door to the inner sanctum is an Indian blanket. It works surprisingly well on this cold, rainy day, though he says it “needs to be an inch longer.”

A rotating space heater keeps the place warm, and fluorescent lights illuminate his “toys”—sculpted heads on shelves and hung from the ceiling, rows of paint and jars of brushes. There’s a painting in progress on an easel: three cowboys in a

white Cadillac convertible racing three others on horses across the dusty plain, a pumpjack and a windmill in the background.

Blake’s playful creativity stems from strong artistic genes and a lifetime in the American West. He was born in Southern California, grew up in Carson City, Nevada, and has lived his adult life in Montana, Idaho and now Texas. He has created movie backdrops, posters, paintings, pottery, furniture—whatever his hands find to do, with whatever material is handy. 8003423001

He created the larger-than-life bronze statue of Kit Carson on horseback that stands near the Nevada state Capitol in Carson City, and his paintings sell in galleries in Wyoming and Arizona.

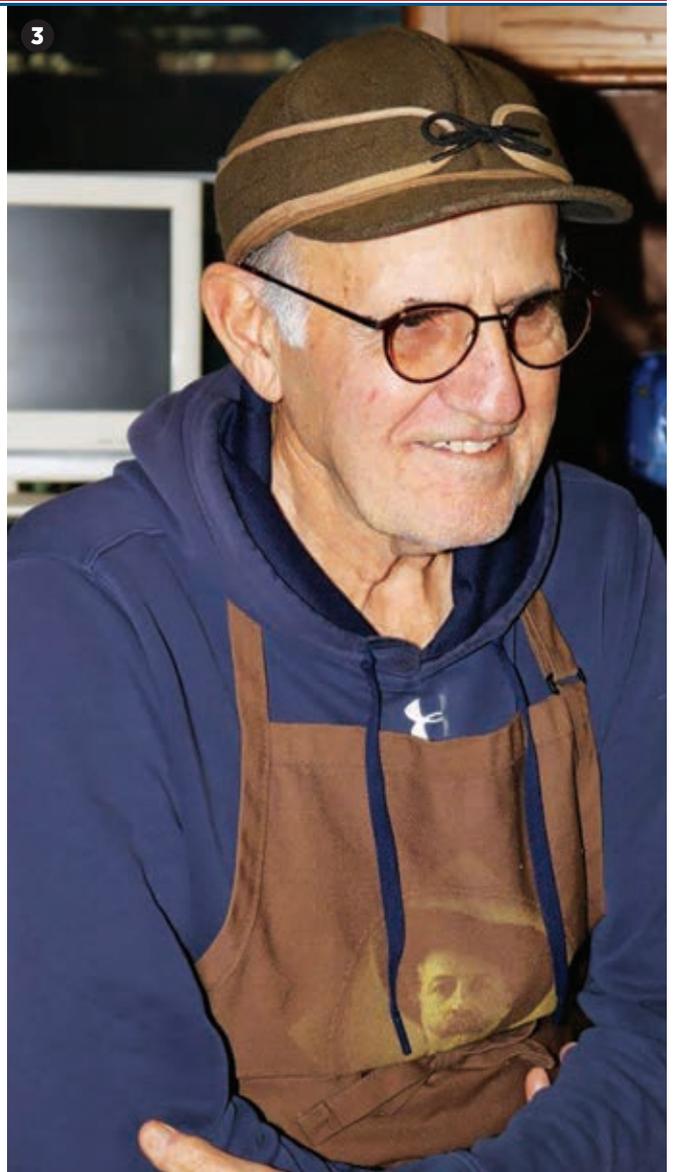
But Blake’s most recent venture is visible in Fort Worth’s new Dickies Arena, where his bas-relief bronzes adorn the south facade of Dickies Arena. An old friend, Denver artist William Matthews, was commissioned by philanthropist Ed Bass to design the mural, a 63-foot-wide mosaic made of more than 600,000 hand-cut tiles depicting wild horses roaming



1. James “Buckeye” Blake captures the exuberance of cowboys racing across the West Texas plains.

2. A 65-foot mosaic mural by artist William Matthews, flanked by Blake’s 12-foot bronze relief statues, adorns the south facade of Fort Worth’s new Dickies Arena.

3. Blake moved to western Parker County a decade ago to raise cutting horses and create art.



under a cloudy sky.

“Willie’s a painter, but he’s not a sculptor,” Blake said. “We’re old friends, so he thought of me to take his drawings and turn them from two-dimensional into three-dimensional.”

The 12-foot-high bronzes bookend the mural, one depicting a Comanche and the other a cowboy, both on horseback.

“We thought of 100 ideas to put on the south entrance there: longhorns and bluebonnets and the star of Texas, all the old stuff,” Blake said. “It all came down to them picking cowboys and Indians. So, I did a Comanche Indian and a cowboy, sort of greeting you, tipping his hat, as folks came in.”

Details of Blake’s sculptures—the Comanche’s spear, the cowboy’s hat and both horses’ heads—jump out of their frames. He had to consider the perspective of viewers, most of whom will see the piece as they walk across a bridge from the third floor of the parking garage into the arena. Making it look right was a challenge.

“These were essentially whole sculptures, like, the back hip of the horse was in the wall,” he said. “It was weird, but I

learned a lot, and it came out great.”

Dickies Arena, which opened in October, seats 14,000 and adjoins Will Rogers Memorial Center. It has already booked an array of events, including NCAA basketball and gymnastics, concerts by George Strait and Michael Bublé, monster truck rallies and Cirque du Soleil. When the Fort Worth Stock Show Rodeo opens its three-week run January 17, it will have its first new home in 75 years.

Bass, the driving force behind the arena project, spared no expense in the selection of art for the arena, which fits in seamlessly with the art deco theme that runs throughout the Will Rogers complex.

“The building itself is pretty breathtaking,” Blake said. “It’s big, and it’s really nicely done. The interior and stuff, everything is finished. ... They did not take the lowest bid. And that era, that art deco era, the middle to late ’20s, that’s great design. It’s one of the coolest buildings in the whole West now.”

Cutting horses drew Blake and his wife to Parker County,



1. Blake's Comanche on horseback jumps out of the wall.
2. A cowboy tips his hat to greet visitors to Dickies Arena.

where they wintered for a couple of years before buying a place and becoming members of Tri-County EC about 10 years ago. They competed for years and still have horses, although now they ride just for fun. 800703068

Blake feels as comfortable in the saddle as he does in the studio. His father worked for the Border Patrol in California, back when it was a job done on horseback. His mother, a native of England, was an artist and came from a family of artists. His son, Teal Blake, is a well-known Western artist and current president of the Cowboy Artists of America.

Blake can talk about art as easily as he can create it. He gets excited explaining the connection an artist makes with a viewer.

"It's like a visual vitamin," he said. "Some people can feel it, and they say, 'Wow! I don't know why I like it, but I like it.' It's just images, shapes and colors in certain places, but you kind of arrange them to emotionally stir someone's vision."

He compares visual art, when it works, to jazz—improvised, never the same twice. Instead of musical notes, he works in color, striving for harmony. 42506001

"Art is music in stop-frame," he said. "If you can see the

notes and what's going on and the subject of the song, it's the same thing in art. You've got to have the right colors, it's got to be in harmony. A bad color, the wrong color, is like hitting a bad note. You're trying to write a decent song, even if it's a little one. It doesn't matter. It's a whole lifetime just trying to learn a little of this. It's not an exact science at all."

Blake said he appreciates Texas because the state takes pride in its Western heritage. Horses, cattle and cowboys are still very much a part of the culture—a culture in which cooperative principles like Democratic Member Control, Autonomy and Independence, and Concern for Community fit like a well-worn saddle.

Growing up on remote ranches, Blake did his share of reading by kerosene lamps. Much of his art strives to capture that frontier feeling, back when the world was quieter and the pace of life was slower. But he appreciates light, power tools and the heat from that space heater—everything that helps him make an electrifying connection with the people who see his work.

"This is what I do, and it is unique," he said. "Not everybody gets to make a living this way. I'm thankful."

IT'S THE LAW Move Over or Slow Down



Lineworkers dedicate long hours to ensuring affordable and reliable electric power. The new “move over/slow down” law reminds us to do our part to keep our utility workers safe.

Look for flashing lights.

When you see a utility vehicle on the side of the road with its amber lights flashing, move over a lane. When you move over, you're giving workers the room they need to safely complete their work.

Slower is safer.

If you do not have an extra lane to move into, the law requires you to slow down 20 mph below the posted speed limit. A slower-moving vehicle is a safer vehicle. 800808210

And keep in mind, significant fines give this law teeth.

Tri-County Electric Cooperative encourages you to always practice safety.

Tri-County Electric Cooperative

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Get Cozy With an Electric Blanket

BLANKETS ARE WARM, BUT ON SUPER CHILLY NIGHTS, THEY MIGHT NOT BE WARM enough. That's when an electric blanket can come in handy. Electric blankets on the market today are smart, efficient and safe. **Keep the following suggestions in mind when shopping for one.**

▶ Not all electric blankets work the same way—some can take 45 minutes or longer to heat up. So check for multiple temperature options, since some nights will be colder than others. And find out whether each half of the blanket has its own temperature setting, which is a perk if you share a bed with someone who prefers a different temperature than you. Finally, check whether or not it is designed to heat evenly. For instance, some electric blankets can detect hot and cold spots and use that information to determine where the heat goes.



MLADEN ZIVKOVIC | ISTOCK.COM

▶ Find one that's energy efficient. An electric blanket uses electricity, so you'll want to lower the heat in your house slightly to make up for it. An electric blanket that costs 7 cents a night to use is good, while one that costs 11 cents a night isn't as efficient.

▶ Make sure that it's washable. If the controls can be detached from the blanket, you can just throw it in your washing machine. Since the blanket will need to be laundered, this feature is a must.

▶ Consider safety features. The safest electric blankets have automatic shut-offs, meaning that you can fall asleep with it on and not worry that you will forget to turn it off in the morning.

Once you've purchased an electric blanket, there are a few extra safety points to keep in mind.

▶ Don't let animals near it. If your pet sleeps with you, don't use an electric blanket. Dogs and cats can chew or claw a blanket and injure themselves (or you).

▶ Be careful with the cord. Never place the electric cord between the mattress pad and the box spring because the friction that it can cause is a fire hazard.

▶ Know when not to use it. Do not use the electric blanket if the wiring or electric cord shows any sign of damage or the blanket is heating unevenly.

▶ Never let a child or elderly or infirm person use an electric blanket. It's simply not safe for everyone. 800849821

▶ Store it wisely. Turn off and unplug the electric blanket when it's not in use.



RAMPAGE | ISTOCK.COM

Resolve To Help Others This Year—and Yourself

MOST NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

benefit us. If we quit smoking, lose weight or exercise more, for example, we get healthier and, often, happier.

This year, add a resolution that helps others, too: Volunteer in your community.

Volunteering benefits your chosen cause, but you'll also get something in return. Volunteers gain leadership experience, learn new skills and make new friends. Plus, the sense of satisfaction you gain from serving others—and affecting their lives—can reduce stress, lift your mood and make you feel productive and engaged.

Volunteering is a fun and easy way to explore your interests and passions. Volunteer work can be a relaxing yet energizing escape from your day-to-day routine.

Helping others doesn't have to take over your life to be beneficial. In fact, research shows that just two to three hours per week, or about 100 hours a year, can confer the most benefits—to you and your chosen cause. The important thing is to devote only the amount of time that feels comfortable to you. Volunteering should feel like a fun and rewarding hobby, not another chore on your to-do list.



BOURBAGES | ISTOCK.COM

Tortilla Soup

MARGARITA ESCOBEDO | WEATHERFORD

- ½ cup onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon butter or margarine
- 3½ cups chicken broth
- 1 can (14½ ounces) diced tomatoes
- 1 can (8 ounces) tomato sauce
- 1 can (4 ounces) green chili peppers, drained, seeded and cut into strips
- ¼ cup snipped cilantro or parsley
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 6 corn or flour tortillas
- 1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- Cooking oil

1. In a 3-quart saucepan, cook onion and garlic in butter or margarine until tender but not brown.
2. Stir in chicken broth, undrained tomatoes, tomato sauce, chili peppers, cilantro or parsley, and oregano. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, 20 minutes. 800758285
3. Meanwhile, cut tortillas in half, then cut crosswise into ½-inch strips. In a heavy skillet, heat ½ inch oil. Fry strips in hot oil, about half at a time, 40–45 seconds or till crisp and light brown. Drain on paper towels.
4. Divide fried tortilla strips and cheese among soup bowls. Ladle soup over strips and cheese. Serve immediately. Serves 6–8 as a side dish. Enjoy!

Tri-County EC Member Recipe Submission Form

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CITY

EMAIL or PHONE NUMBER

RECIPE NAME

Please return to:

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