

# ENERGIZING EVERY MOMENT

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The lineman's daughter calls out to me, "good morning pretty birdie," in a cooing tone, sticking out her finger for me to land on. I stay in my nest atop a crossarm, ignoring her call to me. From here I can see the whole town breathe with the crisp of fall coming to an end. From the lights waking at dawn to the screens glowing at dusk, I see neighbors crossing paths like a network of currents. I have watched this place long enough to know that the hum beneath my feathers is more than electricity, but a promise. It's the electric cooperative quietly energizing every moment.

"Careful up there," calls the lineman with his hard hat tipped up as he scans the line. His voice carries concern, not command. He fixes what breaks not because he has to, but because it's his town too. His wife runs the café down the street and his daughter plays softball under the lights of the ball field. That's how the co-op works. Voluntary and Open Membership means the people who own it are the people served by it. From my perch, I watch the members gather each spring with folding chairs, paper ballots, and a shared pot of coffee, practicing Democratic Member Control by choosing the board that will steer their future.

The night the storm came, the sky went eerily dark and the snow fell fast. I rode the updrifts as branches snapped and lines sagged. When the power went out, the co-op didn't panic, they listened. Despite the snow, by midnight, bucket trucks rolled in from surrounding counties, co-ops answering co-ops. The lineman turned his face from the pelting snow and spoke into the radio. "We've got the hospital feeder first, then the water plant."

"That's Cooperation among Cooperatives," said the board president standing by the substation gate as the trucks returned. Cooperation Among Cooperatives isn't just a slogan here, it's muscle memory. By dawn the hospital hummed, then the pumps, then the homes. When the lights flickered back on, the town exhaled with relief.

Inside the elementary school, I peered through a window during safety day. A co-op teacher kneeled to a circle of kids holding a bright colored poster. "What do you do if you see a downed line?" he asked the giddy group of children. "Stay back!" they shout, delighted to know the answer. This is Education, Training, and Information, and it travels far beyond the classroom with newsletters about energy efficiency and scholarships that lift eyes toward college. I've also followed buses bound for leadership camps, filled with students buzzing with new ideas.

At the café, as I pecked at the ground for dropped food, I saw the lineman and his wife sitting across from the bakery owner. "The rebate we got from the electric co-op for our new electric ovens nearly cut our electric bill in half. We've been able to hire more people and increase production. The bakery is more successful than ever!" exclaimed the bakery owner.

"That's the Members' Economic Participation at work," replies the lineman. "When you're careful with resources, the savings come back to the members."

I've seen concern take other shapes too. During last summer's heat wave, the co-op opened the community center. They kept the lights and fans running steadily and volunteers passed out water. From the windowsill I could see a mother reading a book to her restless child in the library and an elderly man dozed off in the corner. Concern for Community is not loud here, it's constant.

As spring approaches, I glide along the fiber lines to the outskirts of town. "I've got class today," says a lively sixteen-year-old leaning against her porch rail with a laptop sitting next to her. Her family's farm sits nestled in the countryside, once cut off by the distance. Now the co-op's broadband carries her voice to her algebra teacher two counties away. "Without this," she excitedly tells her grandfather, "I'd have to drive an hour each way!"

Broadband is how the co-op connects the quiet places. From kitchens to classrooms to clinics. I've seen telehealth visits save lives and small businesses bloom from a spare bedroom all thanks to broadband. When a new construction company started up last year, it wasn't thanks to luck. It was reliable power, fast internet, and a co-op willing to partner with the town. "We build where the lights are steady," said the owner at the ribbon cutting. I perched on the banner and watched new jobs appear like seedlings after rain.

As sunset approaches, the studious teenager closes her laptop and looks up at me as I rest on the line. "Good night little guy," she says as she heads inside for the night.

Back in my nest in the crossarm, the town looks like a constellation. Each home a star shining with its own story. Electric co-ops don't just keep the lights on, they keep these stories alive. They teach, connect, and grow our community. They are the ones who show up when things go dark.

When the town glows and the night air turns cool, I tuck my wings and listen to the hum. It carries voices. The lineman's concern and his daughter's laugh, the teenager's curiosity and the teacher's compassion. They all remind me that this place is alive with every moment being energized thanks to co-ops.