

Wake ElectriConnection

For members of Wake Electric Membership Corporation



"The power to make a difference"

OCTOBER 2014

Teacher Sponsored by Wake Electric Wins Early Bird Gift Card



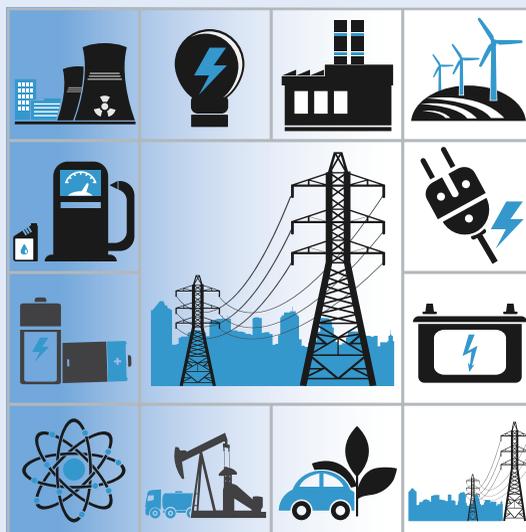
Teachers from across the state who submitted their Bright Ideas grant applications by Aug. 15 were entered into a drawing to win one of five \$100 gift cards to be used in the classroom. One of those winning early bird applicants—Crystal Steiner—entered through Wake Electric. Crystal, a teacher at Martin Middle School in Raleigh, has entered her project, "Learning Through Visual Access", in hopes of being selected in October for a Bright Ideas grant.

Wake Electric will give out approximately \$50,000 in grants in October to teachers in Durham, Franklin, Granville, Johnston, Nash, Vance, and Wake counties. Stay tuned for the list of grant winners' names in an upcoming newsletter. For more info, visit www.wemc.com/brightideas.aspx.

MAC Meetings Set for October

Here's one last reminder that the fall 2014 member advisory committee (MAC) meetings will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 7; Thursday, Oct. 9; and Monday, Oct. 13. Choose one of these dates to attend and join us to hear the latest news from your co-op. There will also be a catered dinner for all attendees, as well as several drawings for \$25 bill credits.

The meetings will be at our Youngsville office at 228 Park Avenue at 6:30 p.m. To RSVP, call (919) 863-6312. For more info, visit us at www.wemc.com/MACmeetingsandcommunity.aspx.





National Co-op Month and an *Electrifying Bear Encounter*

October is Co-op Month. In honor of this nationwide celebration, I'm going to tell you a story. I recently returned to Wake Electric after working in Oregon and Washington, D.C. for four years. As a North Carolina native, I realized during my time away that I really missed not just this wonderful part of the state, but the co-op that serves it. (I had worked for several years at Wake Electric before going to another electric co-op in Oregon).

Wake Electric is a not-for-profit electric utility that is member-owned and member-focused. Many of the employees here also live in the co-op's service territory. Their families go back generations in this area and they are committed to the highest levels of customer service.

A few months ago, I returned to the co-op to rejoin a place that works so hard to make life better for its members in a state I love. As editor of *ElectriConnection*, I want to celebrate this region and the people who live and work here. In honor of that celebration, I'll share with you what happened while I was away.

CANYON, COYOTE, AND...BEAR (OH MY!)

Back in 2010, I decided to leave the South and move to Baker City, Oregon. Before I moved to eastern Oregon, I had done my research. I knew that the wild and remote area featured high desert country, no humidity, lots of snow in winter, a sparse population and no good places to find grits, sweet tea or fried chicken.

But I didn't know of the drastic variety of the landscape. One minute you're cruising down the road

through an endless vista of sagebrush flats, and the next, you're maneuvering your way up the backside of an alpine forest-covered mountain.

One weekend, I went down into the southern parts of Harney County in the far southeast for a solo weekend camping trip. I'd been to Burns, the county seat down there, many times for work reasons. And I'd always marveled that Burns marks the border to some other universe—a doorway leading into a vast alien landscape of jagged rim rock and cooled lava beds stretching down into Nevada. The land there is a place where man is welcome to visit, but remain at his own peril if he doesn't understand the laws of coyote and canyon.

As the summer was coming to a close, I noticed the calendar was edging dangerously close to snow season so, one Saturday, I got up bright and early, pulled out a map, loaded up the car with my camping gear and my dog—a half-beagle, half-basset hound named Tater, and headed to no-man's land around noontime. I decided we were going to camp on Steens Mountain at Fish Lake, a little Aspen-speckled campground about 7,400 feet up the mountain.

Harney County is referred to by many Oregonians as no-man's land. They have a point. Oregon's largest county, with a total population of just over 7,400 hardy souls, is out there. Sagebrush and buttes. Gorges and wild mustangs. Parched desert and hot springs. But not a lot of people.

As I got to the little village of Frenchglen—population 12—at the base of the mountain and turned left on

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a lonely dirt road known as the Backcountry Byway, I began to question the wisdom of taking a camping trip alone. I was, however, sort of ready for bears at this point. All summer I had been readying up on how to survive a bear attack.

I wound my way up the mountain, Tater hanging out the passenger’s side window, and arrived at Fish Lake’s campground, a secluded little stretch that skirts all the way around a rather small, unremarkable lake. I found the perfect camp spot among a little grotto of trees and soft tussocks of long grass, and pitched the tent just two feet from the lake’s abrupt edge. Tater and I sat by the lake-side and watched fish jumping, while a nice fat ribeye steak sizzled on the portable grill. Well, I watched the fish jump and Tater watched the ribeye.

I started to get nervous as the sun went down and families were leaving the campground to head home after a long day of fishing. Eventually, there was just me and about a half-dozen other families scattered around the lake’s shore.

After supper, I left my tent flap open, stretched out on my air mattress and marveled as the sun cast its warm golden glow onto the hills surrounding the eastern rim of the lake. Then, without a warning, night fell and the wind started to blow like crazy. I called my dog into the tent, zipped up the flap and

proceeded to try and sleep. The wind was whipping up little waves on the lake and the sound was so close I felt I was sleeping in a canoe.

And then it happened. I heard a very distinct snuffling sound outside the tent. I tensed up. Tater was already sacked out snoring. Was it a bear? Paralyzed with fear, I sat straight up. The snuffling got louder—it was definitely a bear. Or a porcupine with a cold. Either way, I was in a tight spot.

The minutes dragged by as I frantically cooked up a plan of action, which was as follows: unzip the tent as fast as lightning and quickly shine my flashlight into the eyes of the intruder, blinding whatever had invaded our campsite. I would then make a mad dash for the car, hoping that Tater—who was still asleep—would spring into action. I wasn’t quite sure what would happen after that, but I figured it would all sort itself out.

As I yanked down hard on the zipper to open the tent flap, the zipper got caught in the fabric and ripped the lining all the way around the opening. After finally tearing open the ripped flap, I whipped out my flashlight to blind whatever it was with the bright light. With a frantic flourish, I clicked the “on” button, but instead of a searing bright flash, there was nothing but a weary trickle of tired yellow light that barely lit up

the ground in front of the tent.

“What the...?!?” I shouted, shaking the flashlight until the light went out altogether. Oh, good gracious, I’m going to die out here on this mountain all alone, I thought, while my dog is passed out on the air mattress.

I shook the flashlight again and shone it around. There was just enough light to identify the trespasser.

It was, in fact, a paperback book.

To be exact, it was *A Walk in the Woods*, by travel writer Bill Bryson. I had been reading his camping stories to see how Bill handled bear attacks while hiking the Appalachian Trail. The book had fallen out of my backpack and the cover fluttered in the high winds, scraping the front of my tent.

To be fair, there is a bear on the cover of the book, so there was a bear attack element to the entire debacle. Meanwhile, as I stood there feeling foolish, Tater snored even louder. I sat down in front of my mangled tent and looked out over the lake, feeling the adrenaline leach away from limbs, head, and heart. After an hour of staring up at the millions of stars in the ink-black sky above, I crawled back into my tent and promptly fell asleep, dreaming of the South and of camping trips near Raleigh where the biggest threat was more likely a curious ‘possum.

**OCTOBER IS NATIONAL
CO-OP MONTH**

Wake Electric
Membership Corporation
A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

Ask questions before taking the solar plunge

Here are few tips for those of you thinking about putting solar panels on your rooftop.

HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Before you start a project, clear it with any homeowners' association governing your neighborhood. There may be specific rules in place and you may have to pay for them to approve the design.

TREES

Be sure that nearby trees won't grow up to eventually block some of the sun to your panels. Check with your neighbors about expected growth of their nearby trees. This will save you trouble later.

INSTALLERS

Do your homework when you decide on a solar panel installer. For each company you are considering, review its history, its record with the Better Business Bureau and reviews from past customers. Remember, there are good companies and bad ones out there.

SOLAR 101

Keep in mind that solar panels don't mean you will live off the grid. You'll still rely on Wake Electric for electricity when the sun doesn't shine, or the panels don't generate enough electricity for your 24/7 needs. You'll still get an electric bill. Also, check with your panel installer as to whether or not your panels will supply electricity during a power outage. Many times, if there's no power to your solar inverter, your panels will not produce power. Know what you are (and aren't) getting.

UTILITY

Talk with Wake Electric about utility credits for excess energy and be clear on any additional fees. If you are getting solar to save money, be sure you factor everything in. For details, visit Wake Electric's website at www.wemc.com.

TAXES

In many states, there are tax advantages to installing solar panels. Check with a tax professional about any incentives.

RESALE

Although you may view solar panels as a great asset to your property, potential homebuyers may not. Be aware not everyone looks at solar panels the same way.

The bottom line is solar panels are a major investment. Do your homework just as you would on buying a house or a car.

For more information on working with Wake Electric to install solar, visit www.wemc.com/RenewableEnergyProgram.aspx

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