

Power Lines

Why Ruralite?

*As a member-owner, you must be kept informed.
That is why your utility provides this magazine.
What is more, by practicing the co-op principles
it preaches, 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 that 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 with Oregon 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 late 1972.

The forerunner of Ruralite magazine—"Northwest Rural Electric News"—was first published 50 years ago, in June of 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.

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, non-profit 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 the fall of 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.

This year, 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 49 utilities headquartered in eight

states, with a total circulation topping 363,000.

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 are also 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 is offering, 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 in Ruralite territory.

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

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 would otherwise have to be mailed separately.

While some of that material could be mailed out independently, the cost of preparing, printing and mailing it would actually 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

Forty-nine 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
Golden Valley Electric, Fairbanks
Kotzebue Electric Assn., Kotzebue
Naknek Electric Assn., Naknek

ARIZONA

Duncan Valley Electric, Duncan
Electrical District No. 2, Coolidge
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 Cooperative,
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
Wells Rural Electric Co., Wells

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
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

