



# Okanogon County Electric Co-op Newsletter

May 2017

## Office Info:

Summer Office Hours:  
Mon - Thurs.  
7 am - 5:30 pm

Our customer service call center is available 24/7/365 to handle most electric & propane concerns.

(509) 996-2228

## OCEC Board:

**Sara Carlberg**  
(scarlberg@oceec.coop)

**Curtis Edwards**  
(cedwards@oceec.coop)

**John Kirner**  
(jkirner@oceec.coop)

**Ray Peterson**  
(rpeterson@oceec.coop)

**Dale Sekijima**  
(dsekijima@oceec.coop)

**Paul Taylor**  
(ptaylor@oceec.coop)

**Alan Watson**  
(awatson@oceec.coop)

## Contacts:

**General Manager**  
David Gottula  
(dgottula@oceec.coop)

**Information**  
(info@oceec.coop)

## 2017 Annual Meeting Update

The 2017 OCEC Annual Meeting was well attended. Ninety-seven memberships were registered and approximately 150 people attended. The meeting, which lasted under an hour, included updates on OCEC finances and operations. Additionally there was an update on the PUD's transmission project. Every membership received an energy conservation kit that included 16 LED light bulbs.

As usual, the pies provided by the American Legion Auxiliary #120 were a huge hit!



*OCEC members who attended the 2017 Annual Meeting received this energy efficiency kit.*

## Annual Meeting Election Results

OCEC held their annual Board of Directors election in April. The election results are:

Ray Peterson: 586  
Dale Sekijima: 568  
Sara Carlberg: 449  
Chuck Armstrong: 326  
Write-In: 3

The three candidates who received the most votes were voted in for a three year term.

Thanks to all the candidates who participated.

## ANNOUNCEMENT: Board Opening this Summer

Paul Taylor is leaving the OCEC Board this summer. Per the By-Laws, the remaining directors will select a replacement from qualified candidates who are OCEC members. The replacement will run for election in 2018.

If you are interested in filling this position, please contact General Manager David Gottula at 996-2228 by June 12th.



# Why We Don't Bury Our Existing Power Lines

By Paul Taylor, OCEC Board Member

OCEC board members and staff are sometimes asked why we don't bury the power lines. These questions typically follow a major power outage due to fire or severe snow storm. The initial appeal of burying OCEC's power lines not only includes the idea that we would be better protected from fire and snow storms, but also safety and the vision of valley views uninterrupted by poles, wires and transformers.

But there are disadvantages to burying powerlines, not least of which is the substantial cost. The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that burying a powerline costs between five and ten times as much as installing overhead wires. Furthermore, when overhead lines are replaced with buried cable, there is the added cost of dismantling the overhead wires and poles. OCEC Operations Manager, Glenn Huber, says that local excavation costs, alone, are roughly \$8 per foot, with the cost of materials and bedding on top of that.

Even after installation, the lifecycle/maintenance costs of underground wiring are greater than for overhead wires. Insulation used for underground wires deteriorates over time, requiring wire replacement. Tapping into overhead lines for new connections and upgrading lines to carry more power are both more difficult and costly when wires are buried. Due to the higher costs of underground wiring, OCEC has buried new lines only when individual members affected have agreed to pay the cost.

There are other disadvantages of burying power lines, beyond just cost. General Manager, David Gottula, points out that outages are not prevented with buried powerlines, as underground wires must still be linked to above-ground equipment, such as the (green) ground transformers that step high voltage down in the vicinity of houses, and that equipment remains vulnerable to fire. He and Huber estimate that about 20 ground transformers and conduit junction boxes were destroyed in the fires over the last two summers. Finding and repairing underground wire breaks in buried cables also takes longer than with overhead wires, and excavation equipment can sever buried powerlines.

Finally, while the cost of burying powerlines are prohibitively high, other steps are currently being taken to reduce long-term outages in the Methow Valley. The most extensive power outages have been due to fire damage on the Okanogan PUD's single transmission line running over the Loup to Twisp. The PUD is currently installing a second line, up the Valley floor, which will provide an alternative source of power should the Loup line be damaged, and that project is expected to be completed by the summer of 2017. We have also begun a program of painting a fire retardant to the lower six feet of critical poles within Shrub-Steppe areas of the Valley, thus reducing the risk of outages resulting from brush fires that burn poles.

