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QUANTIFYING CO-OP CLOUT

It's well-known that electric co-ops generate significant local economic punch. To measure how much, a growing number of electric co-op statewide associations are compiling financial data and packaging it to educate business and political leaders as well as the general public.

The numbers can be eye-popping. "Lawmakers are amazed by the overall impact of co-ops," remarks Bill Verner, vice president of government relations, communications & member services for Tucker, Ga.-based Georgia Electric Membership Corporation. He points to a 2005 study produced by the statewide with

the help of economists from Georgia Tech that identified 25,000 co-op-dependent jobs and \$6.1 billion in economic stimulus across the Peach State.

"We know our co-ops make a lot of economic contributions, and these studies help us quantify that with hard facts," emphasizes Dennis Chastain, Georgia EMC vice president of community & economic development.

Pierre, S.D.-based South Dakota Rural Electric Association, one of the first statewides to complete an economic study, recently updated numbers it first collected in 2001.

"Officeholders are constantly changing, so having this information available is a nice way to tell our story," observes

South Dakota REA Interim Manager & Director of Government Relations Ed Anderson. "The analysis showed that our 28 distribution systems and two generation and transmission co-ops were responsible for \$10 million in community and economic development, a combination of cash and in-kind expenditures."

Copies of a report prepared by Arkansas State University for Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (statewide), in Little Rock, Ark., were sent to every elected official in the Treasure State, all the way down to local school board members. "It lets them know who we are," comments Kirkley Thomas, Arkansas Electric Cooperatives manager of economic development.

NOT JUST ANOTHER PRETTY FACEBOOK

MySource.coop attempts to fill a need demonstrated by the 62 percent of Americans who have visited a social-networking Web site, like Facebook or MySpace. But it's a lot different.

Launched by Central Rural Electric Cooperative in Stillwater, Okla., in August, MySource.coop resembles its more famous counterparts in that folks can meet new people and invite them to join a neighborhood group. Users can also upload favorite videos, create photo galleries, store documents, and send and receive messages.

What sets MySource.coop apart is that participants become part of a community of electric co-op members who can receive, share, and discuss information, such as how to save money on electric bills or where to buy a new electric water heater.

Central REC Communications Specialist Larry Mattox believes MySource.coop may be unique in the way it combines social networking with a business's need to inform consumers. "I don't know of another Web site that's doing this," he indicates. "Our CEO, David Swank, thought it would be particularly effective in places we serve that don't have a local newspaper."

The 18,200-member co-op got help constructing the Web site from Oklahoma State University and employed an open-source framework called DotNet-Nuke to keep costs down.

"There's a lot of excitement about it," gushes Tom Parks, Central REC electric & energy services specialist and a MySource .coop project leader. "The social networking functions essentially act as a hook that keep people coming back—something almost always lacking in traditional online approaches. It could easily become more important than our official Web site, crec.coop."

Parks notes that Central REC will use the site to push energy efficiency. "There are sections on water heaters, appliances, and even compact fluorescent lightbulbs [CFLs]. Each features a calculator so consumers can estimate potential energy savings depending on the choices they make."

Home energy audit results will also be accessible from the site, and consumers can

A network that connects you with your communities

Our suite of tools will allow you to communicate and collaborate with other users in your community.

Join Communities
Become a member of MySource and begin joining communities. Within these communities, you will be able to communicate with other members via messaging, and posting news, events and ads.

Use Online Tools
MySource gives users a suite of online tools including photo and video galleries, a document center and MySource messaging. Additional functionality and communities are being added daily, so check it out.

Who can join MySource?

Anyone can join MySource. MySource offers tools that are available to everyone. Members of MySource can network with other members by joining communities. These communities include neighborhoods, towns, and businesses. More communities are always being added, so check back often.

Who is on MySource?

MySource is being developed by a partnership between Central Rural Electric Cooperative and Oklahoma State University Computer Science Department with help from the DotNetNuke corporation. The project began in central Oklahoma and therefore, most users are from Oklahoma.

fill out a Home Inventory Data form that allows them and the co-op to track energy efficiency improvements, such as how many CFLs have been installed. Pages will also be set up for commercial and industrial accounts.

As of the first week of September, some 200 individuals had registered with MySource .coop. Mattox and Parks expect hundreds more to sign up in months ahead.

"We see it hosting many subcommunities across our eight-county service territory: neighborhood associations, schools, and social clubs," Parks relates. "The possibilities are limitless."

