

# Making a Difference

*Co-op staff benefit the community by being involved*

By Pam Blair

Publicly owned utilities were formed to bring affordable electricity to those who needed it. At the heart of their mission, it was about neighbors coming together to better their communities. That same spirit of helping one another continues in the volunteerism of the employees who work at your utility.

As a local business, staffed by your friends and neighbors, publicly owned utilities look for ways to make a difference—in big ways and in small.

Here is a look at some of the things utilities in Alaska and their employees are doing to demonstrate their commitment to the communities they serve.

**Copper Valley Electric Association (CVEA), Glennallen**—In 2009, CVEA again supported the annual Copper River Emergency Medical Services (CREMS) radio auction, which raises funds for a much-needed new ambulance. Run almost entirely by volunteers, CREMS provides emergency medical services to residents in the Copper Valley.

Each year during National Cooperative Month,

CVEA employees volunteer their time to process paper and cans at the Recycling Our Areas Resources (ROAR) center in the Copper Valley.

In October, CVEA also partnered with Copper Valley Telephone Cooperative (CVTC), Rotary and Connecting Ties to run a canned food, clothing and blanket drive to help members heading into winter.



CVEA employees from both districts volunteer to process goods at the recycling center in Glennallen. From left, Robert Wilkinson, Sharon Crisp, Aaron Remer, Jaime and William Matthews, Mary Ellen Bedrick, Barbara Eaton, Jeanie Willford and Dave Duncan.



Mel, Kaleena and Chris Botulinski are ready to walk at the Valdez Relay For Life Event.

CVEA gave students in the Copper Basin and Valedex \$11,500 in scholarships during 2009. Awards included general scholarships, electrical industry scholarships and community college scholarships for members attending Prince William Sound Community College. It also sent two high school juniors to the Idaho Youth Rally leadership camp.

The co-op offers a prize for the best electrical project during the Valdez Science Fair. The manager of engineering volunteers as a science fair judge.

Each holiday, CVEA provides energy credits for food baskets given to families in need.

This year, the co-op funded the Kenny Lake Public Library's summer book camp—a literacy and reading adventure for elementary students.

It sponsored and participated in the Valdez Relay for Life campaign to raise money for the American Cancer Society, partnering with CVTC to walk for 24 hours and taking second place for most money raised.

CVEA sponsored the Kenny Lake Fun Run during the fair. Proceeds go toward educational scholarships. The co-op also sponsors the Prince William Sound Community College Scholarship Fundraiser, which provides scholarships to local students.

The co-op sponsored the Copper Basin 300 dog sled race, the Aurora Conference Basketball Tournament and the Valdez May Day Fly-In.

CVEA donated gifts, door prizes and auction items



Two youngsters learn about electrical safety at the CVEA booth at the Valdez Health Fair.

for various events and activities, including cleanup day in the Native Village of Tazlina, the Gakona Village Council, Ducks Unlimited, Firefighters Splash-In, the second annual Women's Health Event organized by AmeriCorps, the Copper River Basin Child Advocacy Center, the Native Village of Kluti-Kaah, the Copper Valley Development Association annual meeting, and the Glennallen PTO and Valdez Consortium Library Book Basket auctions.

The co-op also participated in community health fairs, providing an electrical safety demonstration and giving out safety information and first aid kits.

**Barrow Utilities and Electric Cooperative Inc. (BUECI), Barrow**—The co-op donated two bikes as summer reading program prizes. Monetary donations supported sports, music and cheerleading programs; the Fourth of July games; search and rescue; native dancers; the American Diabetes Association; Barrow Whaling Captains; and Arctic Education. The co-op budgets \$70,000 a year to fund programs.

**Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA), Fairbanks**—Co-op employees supported the Literacy Council with a team and raffle ticket sales; collected 843 pounds of canned goods for the community's food bank; raised more than \$6,700 for the American Heart Association; participated in the Cell Phones for Soldiers program; and awarded \$28,500 in scholarships to eight students.

**Kotzebue Electric Association (KEA), Kotzebue**—The co-op used \$100,000 in state grants to insulate elder homes. KEA employees were



2009 Copper Basin Scholarship Award winners, from left, Adrina Knutson, Dillon Sondergaard, CVEA Director Jim Manning, Scott Yahr Jr., Gerald Mills Jr., Chantelle Davey and Katya Rempel.

among 90 volunteers. The co-op is testing the feasibility of solar water heating systems in elder homes. KEA provides free compressed air to the community and sponsors a New Year's Eve fireworks display.

**Nushagak Electric and Telephone Cooperative Inc., Dillingham**—The co-op sponsored a basketball tournament, inviting 150 high school students. Employees helped during a health fair; operated phones during a membership drive for the local public radio station; decorated the senior citizen center for Christmas; supported the city cleanup; and placed banners on utility poles throughout downtown in honor of Alaska's 50 years of statehood. ■