

North Alabama Electric Cooperative

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Commitment to progress

Woodville trail blazes way for energy efficiency

The town of Woodville is setting the bar high for electric savings.

So high, in fact, that the town was recently awarded first place in the federal Energy Star 2014 Battle of the Buildings National Building Competition.

The town collectively cut energy usage by 25 percent in five public buildings: Woodville Chapel, Woodville Wastewater Treatment Plant, Woodville Town Hall, Bob Jones Community Center and Woodville Co-op.

Naturally, Woodville Mayor Steve Helms is very proud of the town's accomplishment. "This is an amazing award for the small town of Woodville. I'm very proud of the people who worked together," Helms says. "It's a team effort. This is a great honor for the town, county and state."

It's allowed the town of Woodville a 25-percent (around \$2,000), all-around reduction in energy cost. "Due to more precise control of pumps and chemicals, there has been a reduction in chemicals and testing we have to do at the wastewater treatment plant," Helms says.

These savings can be used for other areas in the city budget — like fixing pot holes and other maintenance.

Helms credits Wastewater Treatment Manager Steve Harnden with the vision for entering the competition. "It turned out well. He was encouraged to enter by Liz Cochran with the Alabama Department of Economic and Com-



Woodville Chapel was awarded the distinction as the building with the highest energy savings. It is primarily rented out for weddings, but when not in use, all air conditioning and heating units are turned off to save energy.

munity Affairs because of the success with the treatment plant," Helms says.

Woodville was awarded an \$8,000 grant in 2013 that allowed the town to upgrade to more energy-efficient treatment equipment.

"The ADECA Energy Division began working with Woodville when they received a grant in 2014 through funding by the U.S. Department of Energy to retrofit a pump in the wastewater treatment plant with a more energy-efficient model," Cochran says. "During the grant period, the city of Woodville entered energy usage data for city-owned buildings into ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager. This helped the city's mayor, council members and wastewater treatment plant manager become more aware of energy use."

The success of this project made Harnden realize the town could save in other ways as well.

"It sounded like a fun contest," Harnden says. "We went down a list for everything the town is responsible for and came up with 5 buildings. It's really interesting to look at the bills each month." So, with Cochran's encouragement, the town entered, and they won.

Teamwork makes the dream work

This achievement is credited by all as being a team effort. “Woodville would do very well in the competition because they worked together as a team, led by a motivated leader, Mr. Steve Harnden, to identify and implement energy-efficient practices,” Cochran says. “Mr. Harnden was instrumental in researching energy-efficient practices and implementing cost-saving methods. The team achieved much of their savings by turning off lights, unplugging unnecessary items and using programmable thermostats. The assistance and advice of NAEC also proved extremely valuable to the team’s success.”

Thanks to LED lighting and programmable thermostats (controlled by Wi-Fi networks), the buildings in town became more energy efficient. “The biggest savings at the chapel was achieved by a review of our standard operating procedures,” Helms says.

Cochran says the key motivation to move along with the competition came from the mayor.

“He realized that energy savings equal cost savings. By conserving energy where they could, Woodville could add more dollars to its budget to pay for things like street improvements and other essential services for residents,” Cochran says. “The town of Woodville serves as an excellent example of how a community or organization can come together to achieve a goal.”

Harnden consistently checked the progress of Woodville’s status. “Every month you put info in the database, and I knew we were doing well, just not that well.

“Halfway through, we were 14th or 15th place, and I’m shocked and surprised we did that well in the end,” he says. Forty-one buildings were entered throughout the state.

The Woodville Chapel won the distinction as the building with the highest energy savings.

“The chapel was the most fun,” Harnden says.

The chapel, a quaint white building nestled in the heart of Woodville, is mainly used for weddings.

“We turn off what we don’t need, which includes making sure units are turned off if they’re not in use. You achieve more savings by turning everything off,” Helms says. And, that means everything from air conditioning units to refrigerators. It all adds up, and the savings are obviously high enough to be noticed.

The town is keeping up the momentum, and they’re already competing in next year’s competition. Every little bit helps.

“I wish more people would get involved in it to reduce energy costs. A lot of people don’t know what they spend until they look at what their bills are,” Harnden says.



The Bob Jones Community Center, located in the heart of downtown Woodville, was among the buildings recognized for saving energy.

He says his next idea to propose to the town will be changing all the streetlights to LED bulbs. “It costs a little more at first, but they will pay for themselves eventually,” Harnden says. LED bulbs last for 10 years.

“Overall, the goal is to do well next year and prove we can sustain what we’re doing,” Harnden says. ■

ADECA will assist any organization, government or business in the state with ENERGY STAR. ADECA encourages K-12 schools, municipalities, building managers, etc. to enter the 2015 EPA National Building Competition. For more information visit www.energystar.gov/battleofthebuildings.