Exciting. Heartbreaking. Sometimes challenging but often rewarding. As I look back, these are just a few words that come to mind that would describe the highs and lows that Morgan County Rural Electric Association saw in 2015. And while the year brought significant progress and successes, it was also one of the toughest years that I saw at our electric cooperative.

In July, Morgan County REA employee Melvin Van Meter died tragically from an electrical contact at MCREA's South Woodrow Substation, located between Woodrow and Last Chance in unincorporated Washington County. Mel was an employee with Morgan County REA for 28 years, most recently serving as serviceman for area one, which covers the Woodrow and Last Chance geographical region.

Mel was greatly admired, loved and respected by everyone at Morgan County REA, especially his fellow linemen. MCREA's employees share a tight bond with each other and are an extended family. Losing Mel had a devastating effect on all of us at Morgan County REA, and his passing was without question the most significant and heartbreaking occurrence at our electric cooperative in 2015.

Another challenge was placed in front of us by way of the South Platte flood that took place in early May. A week's worth of steady rainfall was followed by several inches of snow, which caused the South Platte River and other streams to crest and overflow. The adverse weather conditions and resulting flood wreaked havoc on the roads, highways and electrical infrastructure across Morgan County Rural Electric Association's service territory.

The wet, heavy snow, along with gusting wind and falling trees and tree limbs, resulted in power outages to most of MCREA's service area south of Interstate 76. Ten Morgan County REA substations were knocked off line by the weather conditions, along with many miles of downed electric line. MCREA's operations department responded immediately to repair the damages. Although the crews were unable to work straight through due to worsening weather conditions and road closures, I'm proud to report that MCREA's linemen had power restored within a little more than 20 hours of the time the first outages were reported.

If you were following the articles here in Colorado Country Life or attended our annual meeting for the last couple of years, you are aware of the increase in current and potential electric service projects in the northern part of our service territory due to oil and gas industry expansions. While those plans slowed somewhat due to the downturn in oil prices, the projects are still progressing and keeping our engineering and operations departments busy with planning and construction.

As a matter of fact, last year we saw the completion of one permanent substation in the northern part of our service territory — the Red Box Sub — along with the addition of three skid-mounted substations and a switching station. Additionally, our operations department constructed or rebuilt a total of 72 miles of line last year, much of which was for oil and gas services. And even though the oil and gas expansion slowed, plans are in place for an additional 36 miles of new line construction and rebuilds in 2016.

Last, but certainly not least, is the new MCREA headquarters building. If you were by the construction site on Barlow Road in Fort Morgan between Highway 34 and Interstate 76, you saw for yourself the dramatic progress that was made. The foundation was excavated and concrete poured before 2015 came to an end, with framework of the two-story building commencing shortly after.

Although a specific timeline has not yet been confirmed, it is expected that the construction of the new headquarters building will continue at least into the spring of this year. Once completed, the new building will house the office, engineering, human resources, member services and some of the operations management staff and employees. A grand opening and open house for the new headquarters building will take place once construction is finished and the employees move in to the new location.

So, you can see, 2015 was a year of ups and downs, successes and challenges. Unfortunately, I only had enough space here to touch on the highlights of just a few of the happenings at Morgan County REA last year. However, your MCREA Board of Directors and I will be reporting on the events from the past year in much more detail at the MCREA Annual Meeting at Fort Morgan High School next month. I want to extend a warm invitation to all our members to attend, and I'm looking forward to seeing many of you there.
DEB POITZ RETIRES AFTER 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

BY GEOFF BAUMGARTNER | COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

It was October 9, 1974, at one o’clock in the afternoon when a 17-year-old Deb Poitz walked through the door at Morgan County Rural Electric Association for the first time to start part-time work in the company’s warehouse. “I’ll never forget it. When I walked in for my first day, I couldn’t find where I was supposed to go. I had to be led to where my work area was,” she said with a smile.

More than 40 years and four general managers later, Poitz announced her retirement from Morgan County REA. “I have really enjoyed working here,” she said about her time at MCREA. “When you work with great people, it was easy to stay here for as long as I have.” Her last day as an MCREA employee was January 4, 2016.

Although Poitz held different job titles, her functions at the cooperative throughout her career mainly consisted of working in the warehouse and performing such tasks as material inventory, dispatching, purchasing, writing reports and other duties as assigned.

Poitz pointed to her co-workers — past and present — as a big reason for her longevity at the cooperative. “It’s like a family. It really is. I grew up here and had the opportunity to know some fantastic people and have some really fun times over the years. I will carry with me many fond memories of Morgan County REA,” she said.

Although she retired from MCREA, don’t expect Poitz to be slowing down anytime soon. She says that pretty much the next day she took over as the office manager for C&D Farms (her family farm with husband Curt) and Poitz Farms (her son Cody’s operation; daughter Callie Crone works as a labor delivery nurse at Colorado Plains Medical Center in Fort Morgan).

In addition to working for the farms, Deb launched her own business, C&D Custom Creations, providing such services as glass etching, vinyl crafts and various decals. She is also looking forward to being a full-time grandmother to granddaughter Blakely.

Everyone at Morgan County REA thanks Deb for her years of service and wishes her all the best in her retirement.

UNCLAIMED AND UNCASHED CAPITAL CREDITS

In November 2015, the Morgan County REA Board of Directors authorized patronage capital retirements totaling $1 million for a complete retirement of 1997, 1998 and 1999 and partial retirement of 2000 MCREA allocations, along with a partial retirement of 1994 generation and transmission margin allocations.

It is not unusual for MCREA to have unclaimed or uncashed capital credit checks from margin allocations. In some cases, letters containing refunds were returned due to lack of current address. MRECA also has instances in which capital credit checks were never cashed.

If you have not received a capital credit check and you were a Morgan County REA member in 1994, 1997, 1998, 1999 or 2000, please contact MCREA to verify that it has your current address to ensure that your capital credits check finds you. For more information or questions, please call the office at 970-867-5688 or email kmitchell@mcrea.org.
MCREA ANNOUNCES NEW SAFETY COORDINATOR

Morgan County REA proudly welcomes Doni Harris as the cooperative’s safety and training coordinator. Following his graduation from his hometown high school in Tishomingo, Oklahoma in 1986, Harris attended Murray State College in Tishomingo and Rose State College near Oklahoma City. After college, Doni embarked on a career as a professional singer and musician in the country music industry, touring with such notable artists as Toby Keith and George Strait. After more than 25 years, Doni retired from the music industry and moved to the Fort Morgan area when his wife, Alissa, was offered an opportunity to partner with Morgan Financial Advisors, the financial services office located at Morgan Federal Bank. He started his employment at Basic Energy Services in 2010, where he most recently served as the company’s regional safety coordinator. He began his duties with Morgan County REA in January. Doni’s family also includes four sons: Noah, Isaac, Hunter and Mason. Please join us in welcoming Doni Harris to Morgan County REA.

Lineworker Scholarship Application Deadline Coming in March

Morgan County Rural Electric Association is once again pleased to offer lineworker scholarship(s) to assist individuals in establishing a career in the power industry.

Morgan County REA is looking to award $7,500 scholarship(s) for students to attend linework school the following fall. Qualified applicants and/or their families or guardians must reside in the MCREA service territory, which includes Morgan County and portions of Logan, Weld, Adams, Arapahoe and Washington counties. (James E. Sievers, acct #1441700) If tuition and fees are less than the scholarship amount, students may use the remaining funds for purchasing tools and for living and/or working expenses. Scholarship winners are not required to work for Morgan County REA after graduation.

An electrical lineworker performs many different tasks, including climbing poles or operating aerial lift devices to work on overhead lines 25 to 200 feet above the ground, erecting substations or digging trenches to string underground electric cable.

Completed application materials must be postmarked or delivered to the MCREA offices by March 1, 2016. A complete scholarship packet may be picked up at the Morgan County REA offices by calling member services at 970-867-5688 or by visiting at www.mcrea.org.

Save the Date

Morgan County REA 79th Annual Meeting & Member Appreciation

Saturday, March 19, 2016
Glenn Miller Auditorium
Fort Morgan High School
11 a.m.
Registration, complimentary lunch, gifts and informational booths
12:30 p.m.
Business meeting, election of directors, management reports and prizes

Grand Prize: $1,000
(name drawn from total membership)
Must be present to win

Annual Meeting Prize: $250
(name drawn from members in attendance)
Must be present to win

Greeted “Power” MCREA members at last year’s annual meeting and is scheduled to be at this year’s annual meeting as well.

[Image of Doni Harris]
MCREA Employees Help Families During Holidays

The employees of Morgan County REA showed their holiday-giving spirit by participating in a yearlong project to help families that fell on difficult times.

MCREA employees donated a few dollars here and there throughout the year, and those funds were used to assist families in need during the holiday season. The total amount collected in the 2015 calendar year came to over $4,100 — more than in any previous holiday-giving campaign.

Four families in MCREA’s service territory received holiday assistance directly from the MCREA employee campaign. Items purchased for the less fortunate families included jeans, shirts, T-shirts, sweatshirts, socks, coats, gloves, hats, other miscellaneous clothing items, gift certificates, toys and food as well as help with electric bills, based on need.

MCREA also participated in the Morgan County Golden Stars program sponsored by the Morgan County Sheriff’s Office. Attached to the Christmas tree located in MCREA’s lobby were cards with a list of Christmas gifts to help local families and children who fell on hard times. Those who wanted to help selected one of the cards from the tree, purchased the items listed on the card and returned those items to Morgan County REA. The Christmas presents were then delivered to the families by the sheriff’s office.

More families were also helped by donations of turkeys from MCREA employees through Caring Ministries of Morgan County. (Clay Palko, acct #2347000)

Thank you to Morgan County REA employees for their generosity during this holiday season and throughout the year.

MCREA SELECTS YOUTH TOUR AND YOUTH CAMP DELEGATES

Morgan County Rural Electric Association is pleased to announce that three local high school students will be representing MCREA at two youth leadership events this summer.

Nicole Doll from Prairie High School was selected to attend the 2016 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour held in June in Washington, D.C. Approximately 1,700 students attend the event annually.

The Youth Tour is an opportunity for high school students to learn about our government in a week of educational and fun events. Students from all over the United States, sponsored by their local rural electric cooperatives, converge to tour the exciting sites around the capital as well as meet with industry and government officials.

Before departing for Washington, D.C., a full day is spent on Capitol Hill in Denver meeting with Colorado legislators. In addition, the students are introduced to issues faced by rural electric cooperatives on a state as well as a national level.

Hannah Johnson from Wiggins High School and Taya Baumgartner from Weld Central High School were selected to attend Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp held in July.

The Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp is designed to provide a better understanding of cooperatives, energy prices and legislative processes.

Since the camp is designed to develop leadership skills, it is run by the participants. The students elect a board of directors and the board then selects a general manager from the hopeful applicants. Every student attending the camp takes an active role in the cooperative. They plan activities, games and a dance and banquet.

More than 100 students from Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas and Oklahoma will travel to Glen Eden Resort, just 18 miles north of Steamboat Springs, for the Leadership Camp.

Students applied for Youth Tour and Leadership Camp by filling out an application and completing an essay on a topic chosen from a list provided by MCREA. Finalists also went through an interview process.

Congratulations to Nicole, Hannah and Taya from everyone at Morgan County REA.