

Reaching Out to Entice Young Co-op Workforce Recruits

■ Co-ops learn how a new online teaching program could “light up” their personnel futures as retirements loom.

By Michael W. Kahn

Co-ops face a daunting challenge to fill the many job vacancies anticipated in the coming years. But a new program could help attract young people.

“Light Up Your Future” aims to prepare high school students for potential careers in the electric industry through online learning.

“The target for us is high school students [who] are looking for opportunities, or may not even understand what opportunities...

are available to them,” said Jo Winger de Rondon, vice president of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning.

The council, which works to expand educational opportunities, also administers the Energy Providers Coalition for Education, of which NRECA is a founding member.

“We’re at the heartbeat of understanding the critical need for workforce development,” de Rondon told a May 2 Web conference sponsored by Kansas Electric Cooperatives.

The council has partnered with

Virtual High School (VHS), which CEO Liz Pape described as “really a giant cooperative” of some 450 high schools in 23 countries, offering courses online that might not be available to students locally. All VHS instructors are certified high school teachers.

The centerpiece of “Light Up Your Future” is the online course “Mathematics of Electricity: Careers in Electric Power.”

Lessons range from “transmission system structures” to “employment opportunities in the power industry.”

Pape said course designers paid particular attention to concerns from the electric power industry about students being unable to pass entry-level tests.

“We’re not going to teach them everything to pass the test in one semester course,” Pape told conference participants.

“But what we can try to do is get kids to understand why it’s important to take math seriously, and understand some of the real world applications of math in the electrical power industry.”

“Light Up Your Future” also includes visits to sponsoring utilities and help with creating a resume.

Ultimately, de Rondon said, the goal is to “take [students] to the door of an entry-level job or to the door of a college that can support them in moving into the energy industry.”

“Currently a two-year pilot of this program is being undertaken in the Denver metro area,” Bob Patton, NRECA senior principal for education programs, told *Electric Co-op*

Today. Pilot endorsers include the Colorado Rural Electric Association and United Power, Brighton, Colo.

In January, NRECA and representatives of the Kansas, Colorado

and Indiana statewides, along with a representative of the Northwest Public Power Association, formed the Electric Cooperative VHS Feasibility Task Group.

It is evaluating the feasibility of co-ops developing a concept model they might consider for sponsoring a VHS program in area schools.

Patton said a determination of what the model might look like is expected by early June. □

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Weight-Loss Challenge a Winner

Continued from Page 1

starting weight.

Besides gift card awards for the top 12 weight-loss winners, Scott Spencer, NRECA’s vice president for Insurance and Financial Services, recognized Donald P. Stead, CEO of Arrowhead Electric Cooperative, Lutsen, Minn., and the top managers of three other co-ops for wellness leadership measures that benefited their entire staffs.

“These four co-ops are truly wellness champions,” said Spencer. “They are committed to establishing a culture of wellness at their co-ops that will benefit employees throughout their careers and beyond.”

Twenty-five CEOs documented their efforts to publicize their own progress to their staffs, and some shared wellness materials distributed

The CEO Weight-Loss Challenge was the first in a series of health promotions NRECA will roll out in 2008.

NRECA CEO Glenn English headed his own team at the organization’s Arlington, Va., headquarters, and lost six pounds. The headquarters team’s eight participants lost 51 pounds.

“The challenge has been a great way to raise awareness about the important role co-op wellness campaigns play in keeping our network strong,” said English, adding that improving the overall health of co-op personnel raises morale, reduces absenteeism, increases productivity and helps control benefit costs. “Congratulations to everyone who accepted the CEO Weight-Loss Challenge. I hope that the experience has given you strength to remain at your fighting weight and the desire to support and encourage those

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