As Grand River Dam Authority Chief Executive Officer and a member of the American Public Power Association (APPA) board of directors, it is a privilege to share with you about “Public Power Week 2007” and the advantages provided by cost-of-service electric utilities, owned by the customers they serve.

Each year, the APPA and its 2,000-plus members set aside a week in October to celebrate the American tradition of public power. Producing 14 percent of the nation’s electricity (at not-for-profit and cost-of-service rates), public power touches the lives of nearly 43 million people in every state but Hawaii.

Here in Oklahoma, GRDA is proud to partner with towns, cities and other power suppliers to form the state’s public power team. The beneficial partnerships GRDA has with most of its municipal customers are over half a century old, and the growth and development of GRDA over the years is a direct result of a customer desire to always have abundant, low-cost, reliable electricity. From its first four decades as a small hydroelectric supplier to the last 20 years as a major electric supplier for the region, the chief goal of GRDA has never changed: to supply its customers with the power to grow Oklahoma.

Public power is not a new idea or a recent concept. Nationwide and in Oklahoma it is a tradition that has worked for many years. Why? Because public power means local control of local power to match local needs. Public power means low electric rates generating revenues that are put back into the utility, to create more electricity. Public power keeps ratepayer dollars right where they are needed the most, in public power communities.

But don’t just take my word for it. In the pages of this Currents, you will hear more about public power from GRDA municipal utility customers. They understand the need for customer-ownership, low-rates and the historic and beneficial partnerships they share with GRDA. They understand because they see the benefits at work, everyday, in their Oklahoma hometowns. Together, GRDA joins with them in celebrating Public Power Week 2007.

Thank you,

Kevin A. Easley
Chief Executive Officer
Both the Grand River Dam Authority and the Grand Lake area lost a longtime supporter, leader and, most importantly, a friend in late August with the passing of Barbara Conner.

A member of the GRDA Board of Directors from 1998 to 2003, Conner was the first woman to ever sit on the board. However, it was her appointment as the board’s first-ever lake area representative which brought her the most pride.

“That fact that I’m the first Grand Laker on the board means a lot to me,” said Conner, in a 1998 GRDA news release. “I am proud to be the first woman too, but I am more interested in being the first lake representative. I think GRDA is definitely the economic base of Northeast Oklahoma and I think it is very important that we balance out the good of the entire state with the good of Northeast Oklahoma.”

A native Tulsan whose family roots went back to Oklahoma’s pre-statehood days, Conner practically grew up on Grand Lake. “We were more than weekenders; we were at the lake all summer and every holiday,” she said.

In 1981, she purchased the family place on the lake and became a year-round resident, commuting to Tulsa and her job as the public relations coordinator for the Tulsa Speedway and later, the Thunderbird Speedway. She also covered car racing for the Tulsa World. “I did that for a long time and I interviewed just about every race car driver around,” she said.

However, the roar of the racetrack could not drown out her affection for Grand Lake and eventually, she opened her own successful business in Disney. That endeavor grew into bigger things, and she would eventually own a Langley shopping center.

By that time her home and career were revolving around the lake that she loved. For Conner, it was like a dream come true.

“It was great, I loved it,” she said, “but my friends in Tulsa always kidded me because I had given up a big house there with all the comforts of home for a two-room cabin on the lake.” However, she said, waking up each morning to see eagles over the water or squirrels playing in the yard made it all worth it.

Soon, Conner found herself serving as vice-president of the South Grand Lake Chamber of Commerce. “I think we had five people at that first meeting, and immediately I was voted in,” she said. Over the years she would be “voted in” many times throughout the 1990s and filled the president’s spot three times.

It was a leadership role that would help prepare her for her GRDA duties. During her GRDA Board tenure, Conner would serve as vice chairman in 2002 and board chairman in 2003.

“Even though Barbara Conner’s tenure on the GRDA Board ended before I came to GRDA. I had the pleasure of knowing her for many years. The concern she had for the lakes area, and for GRDA was obvious. She was a supporter, a friend and a servant for the area she loved and will be deeply missed,” said Kevin Easley, GRDA CEO.

Conner was 61.
“IS THAT YOU BOB?” GRDA Coal-Fired Complex Safety Superintendent Bob Scudder in his “super fan” gear.

Photo used with permission of Marvin Shire and Shire Photography of Hennessey, Oklahoma.
Clark Kent entered the phone booth as a mild mannered reporter and exited as Superman in his unmistakable blue, red and yellow uniform. GRDA’s Bob Scudder enters football season as a mild mannered safety professional and transforms into an orange, white and black fanatical supporter of Oklahoma State football.

Scudder, Safety Superintendent for the Coal Fired Complex, began painting his face and donning unique headgear in support of the Cowboys as a student in 1997. He stopped briefly, when he moved to Texas, and then picked it back up in 2005 as an alumnus attending games.

“It was a last minute thing,” said Scudder. “I began painting my face when my friend bet that I wouldn’t do it, and from then on it became tradition. The students and my friends expected it and they wanted it to be different each time so I began to get creative.”

The last minute make-up was a hit with the enthusiastic OSU students. Standing out in the crowd of nearly 40,000, Scudder’s effort won him fan of the game. The Phillips 66 gift certificate he won, as well as his fellow student’s reactions motivated him to continue and to become increasingly creative.

Since beginning the game day tradition, Scudder’s face has been in print, on television, videos, and on the Internet.

“A lot of people want to take their pictures or their kids pictures with me,” said Scudder, who has worked for GRDA for one year.

To date he has won Fan of the Game twice, was featured on the 1998 Athalon Sports Big 12 Preview. Through the Associated Press, he appeared in the Taipei Times. His face has graced the cover as well as the sports page of the Daily Oklahoman. He has been seen on TBS, ESPN, Fox College Sports Channel, was the face of OSU on the Omaha, Nebraska local news after the OSU 2006 win, and has been on Oklahoma’s Channel 9 news. Scudder, also a regular on the OSU Jumbotron, was in the game opening video for the 2006 season. He also appears in four different videos on You Tube.

Though Kent’s transformation took seconds, Scudder’s take a little longer. He begins preparing for the game six hours before kick-off. A tackle box holds his Mehron clown make-up and stabilizer. Carefully he applies the paint in an ordered application to prevent it from getting all over his hands and clothes. This process generally takes three-and-a-half hours.

“I use clown make-up which is grease paint. I start by sharpening a grease pencil and draw the outline. I stabilize the make-up with acetone to keep the grease from running, it’s an irritant if it gets into your eyes,” said Scudder. “The biggest problem is making sure the lines are straight because when you apply it you’re looking in the mirror and everything can get crooked.”

Once the make-up is applied and set, Scudder then puts on his lucky hockey jersey. He competed in an intercollegiate club league 1997-1999 and as a founding member, he served as Charter President of the OSU Ice Hockey Club.

The anticipation builds for Scudder as he makes his way down to the Student Union to take part in the Spirit Walk. Students and fans gather at the OSU Student Union over three hours before the game starts. Scudder will walk with Student Union volunteers, players and coaches and is becoming a fixture. At the mention of the band playing “Ride ’em Cowboy” he lights up and describes the atmosphere.

“I get pumped up on game day but it’s at the Spirit Walk when the fun really begins. The band gets you in to it and then we walk to the stadium,” said Scudder. “OSU fans are the most dedicated and die hard fans in the world as far as I’m concerned. I have a lot of respect for OU fans because no conference is harder than the Big 12 but I believe OSU’s fan base supports our team better. I guess I’m a little biased.”

Actually Scudder’s profession and interests aren’t that far apart and it explains why the Norwich, NY native moved south to Oklahoma.

His interest in Fire Prevention led to his involvement in fire prevention clowning. While attending SUNY Onondaga Community College he learned the basic clowning skills such as application of make-up and balloon animals. While in costume, Scudder found that the entertainment aspect increased audience participation.
“I was in to fire prevention clowning from 1994-1997,” said Scudder. “It was a way to get kids involved and cause them to listen to the message. We saw a decrease in the number of false alarms.”

Wanting to pursue a career in fire prevention led Scudder to enroll in OSU’s Fire Protection and Safety Engineering Technology program. “OSU had, and continues to have, the best program of its kind in the country,” said Scudder.

It was while he was a student that Scudder met and married Kathleen Kennedy. “Kat loves OSU, and is forever in support of academics there, I guess she supports that side, while I support the athletics more. We even got married at Willard Hall on the Stillwater campus, so we are both permanently connected to OSU,” said Scudder.

Kathleen is currently pursuing her Doctorate in Higher Education on the Stillwater campus. Though she is not a huge fan of OSU football she supports Scudder and even sits behind him at games.

“She likes to tell people that she is too embarrassed to sit beside me at the games, but the truth is that we couldn’t get seats together,” explained Scudder, who now holds season tickets on the first and second rows of the 13th yard line. “But she is very patient with me. She lovingly supports me and I try and return the favor. She is my world, and I don’t know what I would do without her.

Scudder does have one other hobby that he and Kathleen share, he is a blacksmith and they are historical re-enactors. Scudder also teaches beginning blacksmithing to an average of 20 students each year at the Stillwater Multi-Arts Center.

“My dad is a knowledgeable and avid tool collector and a fine blacksmith. When I was 25, he developed cancer in his kidney. I had to reassess my life and I realized we had become distant. I needed to get my relationship back with him and I did it through blacksmithing. He took classes in Cooperstown,” said Scudder. “Now we bend steel when we get together.”

Through blacksmithing, Scudder not only forged re-enactment equipment, but a better relationship with his father.
“I took my initial lessons from Ron Woodruff, a relative of my wife; he is a very talented blacksmith. I belong to the Saltfork Craftsmen, the Oklahoma Chapter of the Artist Blacksmith Association of North America and I have learned through it members, as well as Bill Epps, a world renowned blacksmith, and friends like Bill Helean, a Coal-Fired Shift Supervisor. Blacksmiths all share something with one another, no matter how many times you make something; you always learn something new when working with others.

Scudder makes a wide variety of things including camping gear, shovels, knives, cooking forks and square nails among other things. This year was the first that he sold his wares at the Stillwater Arts and Heritage Festival.

The amount of enthusiasm that Scudder approaches his hobbies with is almost equal to the amount he gives to his job.

“I love my job here. For a safety, fire and industrial hygiene professional, I am near a pinnacle in my career, but the great part about my job is that new topics and regulations keep me constantly on my feet, so I never get bored,” said Scudder. “At the end of the day, I just want everyone to go home in one piece, because every employee’s health and well being is too important to sacrifice for any task. I have received a lot of help over the past year in getting to know the plant and the tasks that are completed every day and I want to thank everyone for making me feel welcome.”

The Coal Fired Complex (CFC) Safety Department was created in 2006 in response to the need for a full time safety professional solely dedicated to the CFC and its 224 employees.

Bob Scudder accepted the position 15-months ago and is passionate about his role.

“I’m here to address the safety needs of the employees, we strive to provide a safe and healthy workplace,” he explained.

Scudder holds an AAS in Fire Protection Technology, a BS in Fire Protection and Safety Engineering Technology and will receive his MS in General Education with an emphasis in Industrial Safety in December 2007.

Drawing from his background as well as staying current with the latest industry “best practices”, he conducts and oversees training to prepare GRDA employees by giving them the knowledge and tools to work safely or respond during an emergency or disaster.

Conducting annual safety classes that range from CPR to trenching, he has updated and added programs to comply with federal and state regulatory statutes.

“The classes are not only statutorily mandated but they are critical in reducing workplace injuries,” he said.

He has rewritten and created a total of 19 plant directives with three more in progress. This process is on-going, as the regulations are always changing.

“Many employees don’t see the far reaching impact of safety and health on their families and others. It is my sincere hope that I can help employees see the benefits of these programs so they will act in an appropriate manner both at work and home,” said Scudder.

A safety committee that has been in place at the CFC for at least 21 years was reformed this year. Six employees sit on the committee and join Scudder in his goal of increasing safety awareness and inspection capability.

“No one should be adversely impacted because they took a shortcut or did a job in a manner that is “business as usual.” One of the goals of the Safety Committee is for the selected members, who have demonstrated conscientiousness toward safety awareness, to help their co-workers to think about the impact of their actions. No job is worth being injured over, all of us deserve to go home at the end of the day whole,” he explained. “I am excited about the potential to have a cohesive safety culture and we are working in that direction.”
The Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) department is in the midst of an upgrade. The initiative for the eyes, ears and brain of the Grand River Dam Authority’s (GRDA) electrical grid, began in the fall of 2005 and will be completed by the end of the fourth quarter this year.

The need for Remote Terminal Units (RTUs) that will provide multiple ports for more than one communications access and are IP (Internet Protocol) capable prompted the upgrade. An RTU is a specialized small to medium-sized computer that gathers information such as voltage, mega-watt flow and breaker status then sends this information to the SCADA master at the GRDA Energy Control Center (ECC) and back-up control center. It is this information that is read by the operators at the control center and used to monitor, control and react to the system conditions.

“About half of the RTUs in the system, Harris model H5000s, were put in when GRDA first became its own control area on April 1, 1981. That makes these original RTUs 1970’s technology,” explained Mike Pendleton, SCADA Superintendent. “We need them to be IP capable, which means the RTUs can be talked to by the SCADA master station via a dedicated company Ethernet.”

Though GRDA had included provisions for a back-up control center, an upgrading of the Ethernet capabilities between the Energy Control Center (ECC) and Administrative Headquarters in Vinita proved to be a better solution. Should something happen to the ECC, the back-up center will immediately have access to the RTU information.

The North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC) mandated that all control area entities have a back-up control center as of November 2006. GRDA got its back-up control center operational last fall in time for the NERC audit.

“By making the RTUs IP capable, it saved having to install a lot of duplicate communications equipment at the back-up site as well as providing a more robust communications setup,” said Pendleton.

Jim Fraley, Director of Information Technology, suggested a work order to replace all units rather than piecing them out one at a time. Televent, the company awarded the contract, had the H5000 retrofit RTUs developed and available. GRDA worked with Televent to develop a similar solution for the M3 series RTUs that had been deployed in the field after the H5000s.

“Once the RTUs started coming in we concentrated on the interconnect sites first. These are sites that are points of exchange of electricity with other companies. We have since been able to do some non-interconnect sites and all but one of the H5000s have been upgraded,” said Pendleton.

The upgrade of the RTUs translates into considerable savings for GRDA, short and long term. A replacement that once took three days and involved personnel from three different departments, SCADA, metering and relay is now reduced to hours. What took 50 to 55 man hours, one person can do with the H5000 retro unit in just eight to ten man hours.

“At interconnect sites, we can give other companies the interchange information from a port on our RTU. We decide how and which information is given but both companies get it from the same source, the RTU- which in turn gets its information from either a transducer or meter,” said Pendleton.
“This cuts down on confusion and disagreements in accounting for the energy flow. The RTUs are capable of talking to several different types of Intelligent Electronic Devices (IEDs), such as meters, relays and annunciators using Ethernet. This cuts down considerably on field wiring which also saves man hours.”

Being IP capable also means SCADA has the ability to merge easily and efficiently with the other upgrades currently taking place within the IT department, as IT, IT Communications and Metering upgrades are also underway. Cooperation between each department is necessary to make the transition to the new technology.

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Throughout his 29 years with GRDA, Pendleton has seen a lot of change and growth take place within the Authority. The principle change being the addition of the Coal-Fired Complex. Up until that time GRDA was a hydro-only company. The Authority’s infrastructure expanded to accommodate the growth and the increased transmission line capacity. This meant not only more and better lines, but also more substations and more equipment to communicate with and monitor.

“I’ve seen GRDA become its own control area where it is responsible for managing its own generation and load. Up until that time PSO had done this for the Authority,” said Pendleton. “Recently, I’ve basically seen GRDA move into the 21st century with the new technology now being deployed.”

Pendleton appreciates the sense of teamwork between departments that has contributed to the success of the project.

“There needs to be considerable coordination with all the other departments involved such as Operations, Metering, Relay, Communications and IT Technical Services and Engineering,” said Pendleton. “Stace Kegley, Assistant Superintendent of IT Project Management Office serves as a “point man” to help coordinate this. There is a lot of new information, equipment and procedures in this.”

The SCADA department includes Pendleton, who has been with GRDA for 29 years, and his staff of three. John Young is the Senior Technician, Justin Bates and Jamie Palmer are the technicians. Young has been with GRDA since 1997 and in the SCADA department since 1999. Palmer joined the department in 2002 and Bates followed in 2003.

Although technology is progressing at such a rapid pace, Pendleton believes that upgrading the RTUs will serve GRDA well into the future.

“We got lucky with some of the old RTUs lasting upwards of 25 years but technology is advancing so rapidly these days, it’s hard to predict but I believe what we are doing now will serve GRDA for the foreseeable future.”
Tucked away in a secluded cove along the shoreline of Grand Lake, Har-Ber Village beckons the traveler to stop and enjoy a stroll through America's past. Authentic cabins, appointed with period furnishings, dot the wooded and gently rolling landscape that slopes to the waters edge.

A walk down the charmingly rustic Main Street transports a yearly average of 295,000 visitors back in time as they pass the drug store, barber shop and the stagecoach inn, each arranged and staged with well chosen antiques. Lively melodies from the music house are carried on the soft lake breeze. Following the arrows, as well as their fancy, visitors are free to wander through the turn of the century village on a self-guided tour of the 114 buildings.

Opened in 1968, Har-Ber Village is evolving to meet the challenges unique to operating an antique museum in a modern disposable society. “Will the public go to the museum to see a beautiful Anasazi pot when they can buy an exact replica on e-bay?” Marketing the 19th century for a technological 21st century audience is a challenge that Executive Director Jan Norman has successfully undertaken. Different avenues to augment the village are constantly being explored. This summer a new visitor center and gallery opened, formally welcoming visitors to browse through traveling exhibits and arts and humanities programs on the way to experiencing the village.

Outside partnerships, such as the one they have formed with the Grand River Dam Authority, are helping to promote the village and are producing favorable results.

“There is great economic value of having GRDA on the lake, they understand tourism,” said Norman.

Working with Norman, GRDA’s graphic artist Karen Olinger created an exhibit of the Pensacola Dam using enlarged copies of the original 1930’s photographs. The twenty-month construction period is documented in a black and white pictorial layout. The historic dam with 51 arches that rise almost 150 feet above the riverbed and span 5,145 feet is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A steam engine was relocated to make room for the exhibit. The open building, with only a roof and back wall, is environmentally controlled for preservation and conservation of the detailed narrative. The distinctively airy floor plan provides dual entrance which means the building is either one of the first (1A) or one of the last (99) seen by the visitor, depending on the route taken.

The picturesque setting was purchased by Harvey and Bernice Jones in 1944 as a place to build a summer home. Bernice’s desire for an old fashioned church on the property developed into a mission for both of them and one that she would carry into the 21st century, “a sincere effort to preserve for future generations the way of life as experienced by our forefathers who carved out of the wilderness this wonderful country we know and enjoy today.”

Left: Tourists walk through GRDA’s exhibit, which features the 20-month construction of Pensacola Dam.

Next Page: This water wheel is one of the many historical exhibits featured at Har-Ber Village.
The church, located on the scenic shoreline of Grand Lake, was built by Harvey for Bernice soon after purchase of the property. The first building on the property, it is constructed of handmade bricks that were formed before the Civil War. The bricks were from three massive fireplaces that once heated the old Van Winkle home in War Eagle, Arkansas. Customized stained glass windows were commissioned and a pulpit that was built in 1850 completed the simple design. A marble statue of Christ sent from Italy was positioned in front of the church but facing the lake with outstretched arms.

A cabin that would house the preacher and his family was next on Bernice’s list. Harvey found one dating back to the 1840’s and brought it back to the property where he reconstructed it log by log. Though the original intent was not to create a village, with the quick addition of a one-room school house that was found near Goshen, Ark., the Jones’ village was well on its way and is now home to the largest collection of authentic log cabins in the Midwest and one of the largest antique museums in the United States. The name chosen represents the first three letters of Harvey and Bernice’s names.

Bernice spoke of the development in an early interview and said: “From this beginning, one thing led to another and now there are more than 100 buildings, each of which houses its own display. Harvey loved auctions, and we attended dozens over a four state area. We would also hear about items such as the hearse, which we located north of Oklahoma City or the bank with solid mahogany fixtures which was purchased in Carterville, Missouri. Its closing was caused by the Great Depression.”

The first visitors were curious boaters who would pull up along the shore to get a closer look at the cabin and church. Since then there have been over seven million people who have walked the lush, park-like grounds. Visitors from 39 states and 13 countries, ranging from Australia to Taiwan had already toured the village in the first three months of the 2007 season.
A summertime view of Har-Ber Village's "main street."
The Jones’ gifted the village to Grove, Oklahoma and the Grand Lake O’ The Cherokees in 1999. According to a statement by Bernice, “In 1968, Harvey and I began a labor of love-- Har-Ber Village. We worked long hours designing and building the Village and purchasing the artifacts. We had a simple vision…Our dream came true with the opening of the Village. …I now face a different challenge—to preserve Har-Ber Village so that it will remain intact and true to our wishes and its mission…”

A combination of dedicated people remain committed to carrying out the Jones’ mission. The Executive Director, Board of Directors as well as legislators and volunteers partner together to ensure that Har-Ber Village will continue to educate and enlighten visitors of America’s past.

“We want to carry on the mission and objective of Harvey and Bernice Jones,” said Norman, who was personally selected by Bernice to assume the responsibilities of becoming the first Executive Director. “We have adopted a strategic plan; it is a continuation of the mission and objective with historical preservation programs.”

Though the number of annual visitors remains in the hundreds of thousands, attendance is down slightly from years past. Norman realizes that the audience is becoming farther removed from past, no longer did grandma use “a churn just like that.”

“Our children are the audience of tomorrow. We must add dimension to Har-Ber Village to attract these children, young families, and travelers of tomorrow,” said Norman. “They are a product of our changing world—fast paced and push button. We are challenged to develop and implement exhibits and programs that will continue the success of Har-Ber Village.”

Working with others in the field, Norman has devised interactive educational programs that compliment the historicity of the village. Partnering with the Business Circle for Arts Education of Oklahoma is just one way Norman boosts the “edutainment.” The Native American Program works with participating schools and their curriculum. Scheduling school visits and units of study of the Native American tribes in the continental United States during Pre-European Period focus study on geography, language, shelter, transportation, clothing, tools, weapons, arts and artifacts as well as the cultural contribution shared by the tribes.

The carefully collected and highly prized artifacts of Har-Ber Village allow the students to see history in an authentic setting, but it is the actual setting of the Village that attracts some students.

The Ecology Center hosts several events throughout the season. Project Wild is designed for educators. Sessions are scheduled by the Oklahoma Fish and Wildlife Conservation Center. Upon completion teachers receive certification to implement ecology/environmental activities in classroom study.

Diversifying programs increases the value, viability and public awareness of Har-Ber Village. Norman has worked tirelessly during her tenure to secure funding, elevate perception and broaden the appeal of the village.

“We are challenged to develop and implement exhibits and programs that will continue the success of Har-Ber Village.”

“Har-Ber Village is a major source of tourism revenue,” said Norman.

It is partnerships like the one Har-Ber Village shares with GRDA that have enabled Norman to achieve growth. Proud of their common history, GRDA shares Norman’s enthusiasm in promoting Grand Lake.

The GRDA exhibit is one among the 116 exhibits currently on display. Located just outside of Grove, on the shore of Jones Cove, Har-Ber Village is open daily March 1-October 14 Monday through Saturday 9:00 am to 5 pm and on Sunday from 12:30 pm to 5:00 pm; October 15 through November 15 Monday through Saturday 9:00 am to 4:00 pm and Sunday 12:30 pm to 4:00 pm. Admission is $3.50 for 14 yrs to 62 yrs, $2.50 for seniors 62+ and children under 14 are free. There are group discounts available and school sponsored tours (K-College) are free.
Infrared Imaging
While officials in the Oklahoma public power community of Collinsville look on, GRDA Assistant Superintendent of Customer Service Phil Stokes (second from right) uses an infrared camera to check an electric circuit panel at Collinsville High School. Infrared imaging is a service GRDA offers its customers. Because the camera can detect “hot spots” and other potential problems early, it has helped customers to prevent costly outages through preventative maintenance.

Tools of the trade
James Frailey (right) shows fourth and fifth grade students some of the industrial-sized wrenches used to work on the hydroelectric generators at GRDA’s Robert S. Kerr Dam. Frailey and other members of the dam’s maintenance crew take part in an annual science festival at the Oklahoma City Zoo. The crew promotes the importance of hydroelectricity and gives students a closer look at how falling water can create megawatts. Throughout the year, GRDA also gives tours of its generation facilities to school and civic groups from across the state.

TPWA Building
The words on the side of this Tahlequah Public Works Authority (TPWA) building in the Oklahoma public power community of Tahlequah sum up the tradition of public power in Oklahoma: the ability of the people to serve themselves and build for posterity. The county seat of Cherokee County, Tahlequah is one of Oklahoma’s fastest-growing communities. The people there have demonstrated the “ability to serve themselves” since Tahlequah first became a public power city in 1919.
In the lake community

GRDA Lake Patrolmen David Edwards (left) presents an “I got caught wearing my life jacket” T-shirt to Marc Hudson, president of the Lake Hudson Association. The GRDA Lake Patrol used the T-shirt campaign to promote life jacket usage during the 2007 summer boating season. Like Oklahoma’s public power communities, the GRDA “lakes community” is another area where GRDA focuses its community outreach efforts.

A Grand Project:

With help from GRDA Environmental Superintendent Perry Friedrich (right) Boy Scouts plant trees in the Oklahoma public power community of Claremore. The tree planting effort was an initiative of “A Grand Project” which is the Authority’s “green team.” The project’s goal is to partner with customer communities, local businesses and area schools in projects that enhance environmental quality while educating participants as to how they can make a difference. Other public power communities, including Pawnee, Pryor and Collinsville have also taken part in “A Grand Project” in recent years.

GRDA Volunteers

Each man in this picture is both a GRDA employee and a volunteer fireman in his respective community. Each year, whether they be fighting fires, coaching little league, building homes or serving in numerous other ways, GRDA employees log thousands of volunteer hours in service to their hometowns and Oklahoma’s public power communities.

Electric Safety Education

Promoting electrical safety in an eye-opening way. That’s what GRDA Transmission Department personnel are able to show with an exhibit and demonstration they take into the community, to schools and civic groups. In this shot, GRDA Lineman Brent Scott “cooks a hot dog” to show the power of electricity in a high voltage line.
Oklahoma’s public power team explains…

The importance of hometown power

“I see the benefits of public power everyday. TPWA is a wonderful, big asset to the community. Our electrical system is an asset to our city.”

- Stanley Day
  Tahlequah Public Works Authority

“I think public power is better regulated and it makes a difference. We have a local crew; all but one was raised here.”

- Will Davis
  City of Sallisaw
  Electric Department

“Public power means service to the customer.”

- Ronald James
  Pawnee Electric
“The availability of reasonably priced wholesale power allowed the city to supplement the power produced locally.”

- Jeff Tullis
  Stillwater Power

“It’s in the best interest of our customers, period. It is not profit driven, not shareholder driven and not publicly traded. It benefits our entire community.”

- Mike Doublehead
  Stilwell Utilities

“Our partnership with GRDA has been very beneficial to the city of Wagoner over the years. We are a small municipality and rely on GRDA’s technicians to help us when we have problems, including help with our substations.”

- Dwayne Elam
  Wagoner Public Works
The real power behind GRDA

“The good low-cost and reliability of power feeds back into our communities. During the ice storm last winter, GRDA provided vehicles and water to the people that were without power for so long. Our employees are generous. They touch the lives of other people and it reflects back on how good GRDA is. I think GRDA, and public power as a whole, are very responsive to the needs of its customers.”

- Randy Chitwood
  Senior Heavy Equipment
  Transmission & Engineering

“GRDA is good for Oklahoma because it is close to home. The employees from all areas work together as a team. The low-cost generates more jobs for the people in the communities. I am a 24-year veteran of GRDA and I enjoy this job. I enjoy working in an environment where management is open to ideas. Together, with my crew, we work together as a team. GRDA is an environment where we can do that.”

- Rick Howard
  HVAC Superintendent
  Coal-Fired Complex
“I don’t think the average person outside of the utility industry realizes the many benefits of Public Power. One of the most important is providing lower electricity rates that become the competitive standard for all others to be judged by. This keeps the investor-owned utilities from maximizing profits at the consumers expense. Another benefit is that revenues from electricity sales are recirculated through the local economy; public power puts the money back to work where it does the most good for the most people.”

- Douglas Callison
  Senior System Operator
  Energy Control Center

“GRDA is good for Oklahoma because the electric power GRDA provides benefits the municipal customers we serve by providing them a product at a low price that they can in turn sell to their customers. This source of revenue for the municipality is not only a benefit for that community, but the surrounding area as well.”

- Jennifer Weatherford
  Superintendent of Revenues
  Administrative Headquarters

“Public Power is good for Oklahoma, because it comes back to the people in the area. The money that comes in from recreation on the lakes feeds back into our communities, not only from across the state, but from surrounding states as well. Whether it’s recreation or low cost electricity, the benefits of GRDA and public power are easy to see and are widespread in the area.”

- Tim Webb
  Kerr Maintenance
  Kerr Dam
As Oklahoman’s prepare to celebrate the centennial, many reflect on the pioneering character, strong work ethic, and cooperation of those that worked together to shape the state and its future. Determination and grit is echoed in the motto chosen in 1893, “Labor Omnia Vincit” Labor Conquers All Things.

The spirit of cooperation is still energizing the Oklahoma economy and generating success. The Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) and the MidAmerica Industrial Park (MAIP) work hand-in-hand to bring growth, industry and jobs to Northeastern Oklahoma.

Believing in the “public” of public power, GRDA pledged to the people of Oklahoma to “assist in area economic development and help our customers adapt to changes in their business environments.”

GRDA has made good on that pledge by forming powerful and progressive partnerships with municipal, electric cooperative and industrial customers in the state. That effort also meshes with MAIP’s mission; which is to increase area employment by bringing new business to the region and assisting existing businesses. The outcome has proven vital to the economy.

“It’s a natural partnership,” said Sanders Mitchell, MAIP Administrator. “We provide a large customer base for the GRDA and they provide low-cost electricity that is essential for the development of this property.”

Founded in 1960, MAIP has grown into the largest rural park in the nation. The 9,000-acre park is home to nearly 80 companies that employ over 4,500 people. The park is owned and operated by a public trust.

“GRDA is critical to the trust, the trust was written with a GRDA Board member to sit on this board,” said Mitchell.

Power, water, land and labor are what draw industries to MidAmerica, he added and “the big ticket item is the low cost power, it helped us get Google. For power dependent companies it is very critical, it is a real asset to those companies.”

The significance of having two GRDA facilities located adjacent to the park-- the Coal Fired Complex (CFC) and Transmission Headquarters-- is recognized immediately by potential companies.

“That’s very big for them. I tell them the industrial park sits in the shadow of the smokestacks,” said Mitchell. “There are 1000 megawatts in the park.”

Mitchell explained the closer the power source, the less down time will be experienced. If there are two miles of line between the company and the power source, there are two miles of things that could go wrong. During the ice storm of 2007, not one industry in the park lost power.

Meanwhile, GRDA’s Transmission Headquarters, and transmission maintenance employees are stationed close as well, allowing for prompt response to customer problems.
An aerial view of the 9,000-acre MidAmerica Industrial Park. Located just south of Pryor, it is the largest rural industrial park in the nation.

GRDA’s Frank “Slug” Monahan (recently retired) tests the conductor on the new switchgear at the Orchids plant. Orchids is a GRDA industrial customer and resident of the MidAmerica Industrial Park.
Once upon a time, Oldsmobile enticed us all to buy a new model car by reminding us that it was “not your Father’s Oldsmobile.” In other words, they were offering something new and totally different; something that could positively alter the driving experience in the future.

Today, as we survey the ongoing industrial and economic growth of the MidAmerica Industrial Park, the city of Pryor and, really, all of the region, we may be tempted to apply that concept to what we see. After all, Gatorade and Google are building impressive operations that will positively impact the region for years to come; events like Country Fever and the inaugural Rocklahoma are bringing thousands of visitors to the area; and all across the area, there is a sense of excitement and positive anticipation for the future that I am not sure you can find in too many other places.

Certainly, new and impressive industrial neighbors, and new and impressive events lead to the conclusion that, indeed, things are on the horizon that will continue to positively alter the area in the future. And as chief executive officer of the Grand River Dam Authority, I am proud to be part of an organization that continues to play a vital role in all this development.

When you think of GRDA, you may think of electricity or lake management, but economic development has also been a cornerstone of this organization since its creation in 1935. GRDA’s founding fathers understood that low-cost, abundant electricity could bring growth and development to the region, just as the visionaries who made the MidAmerica Industrial Park a reality understood that one day, the area could be a prime destination for industry. Together, these two organizations continue to achieve their goals through a strong partnership and mutual desire to improve quality of life and opportunity all around. So today, could we say that “this is not your father’s GRDA and MidAmerica?”

Perhaps so, after all the important decisions we must make today – driven by changes in technology, electricity demand, and new industries – may seem very foreign to our founders. However, because our core goals for economic and industrial development have never changed, I think its safe to say that the MidAmerica Industrial Park and GRDA of 2007 are exactly what they were intended to be all along.

“Having transmission here in the park is a great asset. Companies on GRDA’s system don’t have to wait to get a crew out to fix the problem. There is a definite reduction in downtime; seldom do they have any downtime. They have an outstanding record of taking care of the park as well as the area.”

In the end, it is easy to see why the partnership between MAIP and GRDA is so beneficial to the area. Working together, the organizations help drive the economy of Oklahoma.

“The partnership is a good thing. I feel like we’re a good partner with GRDA and they are a good partner with us.”

Sanders Mitchell (left), MidAmerica Industrial Park Administrator, and his staff work to bring new industry to the park.

GRDA “Point of View”...

Strong partnership; mutual desire
A man named Henry Holderman living in what was then Indian territory envisioned the Pensacola Dam Project in the late 1800s. The project finally received funding in 1937, and work began. Disney and Langley, two nearby communities on either side of the dam, became instant boomtowns. The Pensacola Dam uses a multiple arch design that was the ideal structure for the time period.

When construction began, we were in the middle of the Great Depression. Money and supplies were scarce, but labor was plentiful. Three thousand men worked on the dam for sixteen dollars a week. Only thirteen men died during the Pensacola dam project due to new net designs and improved safety methods. These guidelines were developed during earlier WPA projects such as the Golden Gate Bridge when thousands died.

The dam was completed in an astounding thirty-three months, with only one delay due to rain. As it had been extraordinarily dry while the dam was being built, there was concern that it would not fill up for six to seven years. The Pensacola dam was completed in March of 1940, and then it started to rain. All throughout the summer and a little into the fall, heavy rains fell. Remarkably, by the middle of autumn, the dam was full.

During World War II, the government appropriated the electricity that was being generated by the Pensacola dam. Most of the power was diverted to two airplane-manufacturing plants, one in Wichita and one in Tulsa, and some was channeled to the DuPont plant nearby which was manufacturing ammunition for the war effort. Later, during the Cold War, part of the dam was converted into a fallout shelter in the event of nuclear war. Some of the rations from that period are still there.

There is something poetic about the way that hydroelectric power works. All you do is run water through the turbines and then you have electricity. It creates no waste, there are no nasty by-products, and it is completely renewable. The Pensacola dam is truly a great invention.

This story was submitted by 12-year old Annie Patocka after touring the Pensacola Dam with a group of homeschoolers from the Tulsa area. It previously appeared in the Weekly Observer.
It takes more than just electricity to insure the success of rural electric cooperatives in Oklahoma. It also takes the expertise and dedication of many POWERful employees.

During Public Power Week (October 7 – 13) the Grand River Dam Authority salutes those employees, like this Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative Crew, for keeping the lights on.

They are your neighbors, providing a valuable service to your neighborhood. And they are the real power behind your power provider.