



A New Way to Support Communities

Foundation opens doors as OTEC serves its member/owners, families and communities

By Susan Parrish

The Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative Board of Directors recently approved forming a 501(c)(3) foundation to leverage additional community support.

The OTEC Member Foundation will oversee OTEC's existing charitable programs supporting its members, families and communities in Baker, Grant, Harney and Union counties.

"OTEC currently has a host of charitable programs to support our member/owners and the communities we serve," says Foundation Director Lea Gettle. "Forming a foundation ushers in

more opportunities for OTEC to further leverage resources and expand capability to increase impact in our service area."

The OTEC Member Foundation will have separate bylaws and articles of incorporation from the cooperative. OTEC's board of directors will continue to have governing authority on structure and financial support, and will ensure the cooperative and its foundation align.

Pandemic Elevates Community Support
Formation of a foundation to support OTEC's membership was prioritized as a strategic initiative in 2019.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent impacts, the purpose of the foundation was amplified. Public health restrictions canceled the Washington, D.C., Youth Tour and Idaho Youth Rally in spring 2020. OTEC set aside scholarship funds for these two canceled youth programs, and the board began discussing the best use of the unspent funds.

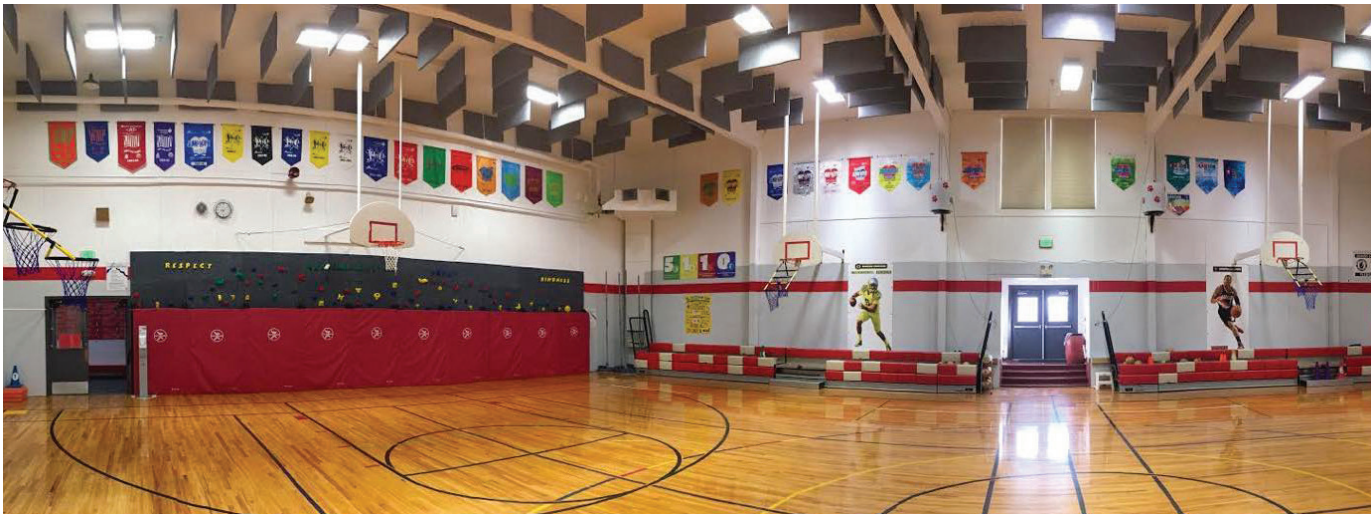
"With the unused scholarship funds,

the board elected to do something to help our local communities recover during the pandemic, so we donated those funds to food banks and local community assistance programs across our service territory," Lea says.

In 2020, OTEC donated nearly \$30,000 of charitable contributions to more than two dozen local organizations, kids' programs and first-responder agencies in the four counties it serves.

"With the current state of our communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OTEC is presented with a significant opportunity to support our members and communities that are struggling as we begin to see our economy reopening and recovering," says Board President Charlene Chase.

"Many resources available to OTEC as a 501(c)(12) electric cooperative can be coupled with resources available to 501(c)(3) charitable organizations to further leverage funding and make a big impact in supporting our communities," Lea adds.



To support the communities it serves during the pandemic, Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative donated tens of thousands of dollars to various organizations across its service territory, including youth fairs and rodeos, schools, food banks and first responder agencies. OTEC will have the opportunity to make an even larger impact with the OTEC Member Foundation. SUBMITTED PHOTOS



Benefits and Recipients

There are several benefits of OTEC creating a 501(c)(3) foundation, including:

- Extends the cooperative's charitable arm and provides additional opportunities to leverage current and future investments.
- Allows the co-op to seek new opportunities to leverage additional grant opportunities as well as tax-deductible donations from members and partners to advance its current programs.
- Increases opportunities for members to engage with their community.
- Highlights the cooperative's horsepower under a charitable flag without conflicting with the cooperative's core functions of utility operations.

Most of OTEC's community-focused charitable programs will fall under

the foundation:

- Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which gifts free books to children ages birth to 5.
- Funding for academic scholarships, trade school scholarships and lineman school scholarships.
- Idaho Youth Rally, which benefits high school sophomores.
- Washington, D.C., Youth Tour, which benefits high school juniors.
- The member-to-member program (bill roundup).

OTEC is very active in donating to various community-facing projects. In addition to food banks and community assistance programs, this year OTEC donated to children's summer programs.

OTEC is not the first electric

cooperative to form a foundation. There is a rich tradition of cooperatives across the nation forming foundations to better serve their communities.

"A year ago, we couldn't have predicted that a global pandemic would impact our communities so severely," Charlene says. "We are thankful OTEC has found a way to support our member/owners, families and communities during these difficult times." ■

Visit www.otec.coop/member-foundation for more information.