

# ANNUAL MEETING 2017

## Bluebonnet's focus: A commitment to member service



By Will Holford

Nearly 600 Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members and guests filled the Sons of Hermann Hall in Giddings for the co-op's Annual Meeting on May 9. Before the meeting began, members and guests enjoyed music from Bert Rivera and the Ramblers, with special guest Wyatt Aleman, a 12-year-old fiddling prodigy from Harwood, Texas.

The meeting opened with a video that included a safety briefing, milestones achieved by Bluebonnet last year, and introductions of each Bluebonnet board member and spouse. Board Secretary-Treasurer Roderick Emanuel then led the members and guests in the invocation, pledges of allegiance to the United States and Texas

flags, and in singing the national anthem.

Board Chairman Ben Flencher opened the business portion of the meeting by thanking members for their continued support in 2016.

"Last year was a great year, but we had a few changes and some tough challenges," Flencher said. "We handled them superbly and professionally, largely because of the support we got from our members."

"I hope our members are as proud of their co-op and its employees as we are of our members. Everything we do — each director and every employee — we do with our members' best interests in mind. That's what sets Bluebonnet apart from other utilities and service providers," Flencher said.

General Manager Matt Bentke echoed Flencher's comments about Bluebonnet's members and employees.

"It's great to see hundreds of familiar faces and friends, and also so many first-time attendees and new faces at this year's Annual Meeting," Bentke said. "Our members' participation in our Annual Meeting shows how supportive and engaged they are in their co-op. They're the reason our employees are so

committed to providing the best possible service, and looking for ways to continuously improve. Our goal is to be the standard by which our members measure all other service providers in our area."

Using results from Bluebonnet's annual member survey, which was taken in March, Bentke showed the audience that the co-op is on track to meet that goal: 94 percent of members said they have a positive impression of the co-op, and 95 percent rated their electric service as good or excellent.

"Though we never take things for granted, in the past we have consistently seen these numbers in the low- to mid-90s," Bentke said. "But this year we saw a seven-point increase from good to excellent. That confirms what we thought and what our members know — that we are providing outstanding service."

Bentke pointed to two other survey questions related to Bluebonnet's service. First, 96 percent of members who experienced an outage during the past three years have a positive impression of the co-op, and 94 percent who spoke to a member service representative said their issue was

resolved to their satisfaction.

"Those numbers blew me away," Bentke said. "They're very significant because we had some major outages last year, during which some members were without power for two or three days," Bentke said. "And many of the conversations with our member service representatives are about tough issues."

Flencher and Bentke reported other important achievements from last year. In May and June of 2016, Bluebonnet members received their share of \$3.14 million in capital credits, which are excess revenue similar to the dividends that for-profit companies pay to investors. In the past 10 years, Bluebonnet has returned \$38.8 million in capital credits.

Also, the ranks of Bluebonnet members adding solar energy systems on their homes, businesses or property has grown.

"We have more than 260 members with solar systems and 18 members with wind turbines on our electric grid, accounting for 3.5 megawatts of renewable power," Bentke said. "We are proud to be able to work so well with our members who want to install renewable energy on their property. We also work very

hard to add renewable energy to our generation portfolio as long as it makes sound financial sense and benefits every member."

In other business, four of Bluebonnet's directors who were up for election were unopposed and re-elected by general consent. Directors Roderick Emanuel, District 3, Bastrop County; Russell Jurk, District 4, Lee, Milam and Williamson counties; Byron Balke, District 6, Austin, Colorado and Fayette counties; and Robert Mikeska, District 7, Washington County retained their board seats in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws. More than 6,000 members participated in this year's elections by registering at the meeting or by proxy. More than 40 door prizes were handed out during the meeting, including two Cub Cadet riding mowers. Wick and Monique Mackenzie of Smithville won a 2006 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 in a raffle among all Bluebonnet members who registered at the Annual Meeting or submitted a proxy. The Mackenzies became Bluebonnet members in 2016.

"When we got the call from Bluebonnet we thought we were being asked to buy raffle tickets to win a truck," Wick Mackenzie said. ■

**1.** Sharon Vasbinder talks to Bluebonnet lineman John Matejcek and metering supervisor James Jordan.

**2.** Board Chairman Ben Flencher speaks to members. Behind him, some of the many door prizes.

**3.** Hundreds of Bluebonnet members attended the co-op's 2017 Annual Meeting in May.

**4.** Bluebonnet General Manager Matt Bentke visits with co-op members before the meeting.

**5.** Rachel Ellis, center, Bluebonnet's chief administrative officer, hands the keys to a 2006 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 to Bluebonnet members Wick and Monique Mackenzie of Smithville. The couple won a drawing for the truck, which was retired from the co-op's fleet. The drawing after the annual meeting included the names of all co-op members who attended the meeting or returned a completed proxy form.

Find more photos at [smu.gs/2rHAQfA](http://smu.gs/2rHAQfA)