

NE CONNECTION

A PUBLICATION OF NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

LEAST LIKELY

GET TO KNOW GREG HIGHSMITH



OCTOBER 2024



Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives

NE CONNECTION

A PUBLICATION OF NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Northeast Connection is published monthly to communicate with the members of Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative.

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BUSINESS HOURS

Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Offices are closed Saturday, Sunday and holidays.

DISPATCHING AVAILABLE 24 HOURS AT

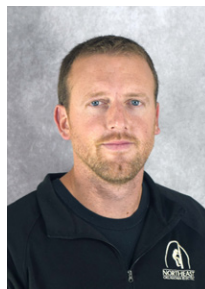
1.800.256.6405

If you experience an outage:

1. Check your switch or circuit breaker in the house and on the meter pole to be sure the trouble is not on your side of the service.
2. When contacting the cooperative to report an outage, use the name as it appears on your bill, and have both your pole number and account number ready.

Please direct all editorial inquiries to Public Relations at 800.256.6405 or email publicrelations@noec.coop

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RESPONSIBLE FLEET STEWARDSHIP

Paul Hillerman
Director of Fleet Services

Have you ever thought about what it takes for one of your favorite products to reach you? Whether that product was

delivered to your home or you had to go and get it yourself, physical transportation was involved.

At some point every product and service we use requires physical transportation. During materials acquisition, manufacturing, wholesale, distribution, and retail phases, something must be physically moved from one place to another.

Just as important as the *availability* of transportation is the *reliability* of the carrier itself. We all know from personal experience how life can grind to a screeching halt when one of the approximately 30,000 components on a standard vehicle falls into disrepair.

In the utility world, poles, wire, line workers, and equipment must all be transported to and from job sites on a daily basis. Should one of our NOEC service trucks become unreliable for any reason, progress is halted and problems arise downstream. That's where the fleet services team comes in.

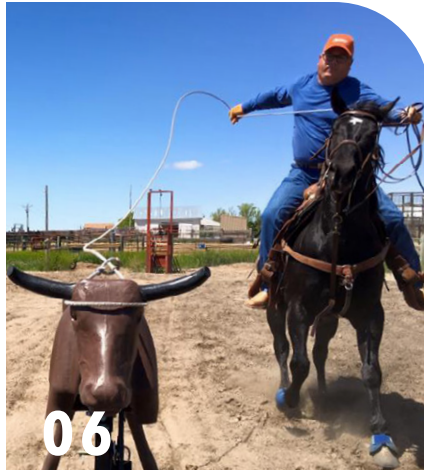
The importance of fleet maintenance within the utility industry cannot be overstated. NOEC vehicles are valuable assets that enable us to provide reliable, safe, and cost effective service—all for the ultimate benefit of our membership. Our fleet must be maintained in optimal condition at all times in order to reduce the likelihood of accidents for the protection of our employee-operators and the public we serve. Reliability is paramount in the utility sector where downtime can lead to disruptions in service that affect countless individuals and businesses. We were very proud, for example, of how our fleet performed during the challenging May '24 tornado recovery effort.

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NATIONAL CO-OP MONTH



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GREG HIGHSMITH



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ASSISTANCE AGENCY LIST



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FALL EATS FROM DELCO

\$100 IS HIDING!

Search the pages of *Northeast Connection* for a 6-digit account number with an asterisk on each side. For example: *XXXXXX*. Compare it to your account number, which appears on your monthly electric bill. If they match, contact the cooperative at 918.256.6405, by November 1, 2024, to claim a \$100 credit on your electric account.

OCTOBER EVENTS**Mind & Body Wellness Series****Oct 1 | Grove**

Grand Lake Family YMCA

**Women on Fire
Women's Conference****Oct 4-5 | Pryor**

Open Door Venue

Pelican Festival**Oct 4-6 | Grove**

Wolf Creek Park

2024 Eastern OK Fall Retreat**Oct 11-14 | Pryor**

New Life Ranch Frontier Cove

Vinita Oktoberfest**Oct 12 | Vinita**

Holy Ghost Catholic Church

River Bridge Bluegrass Assoc.**Oct 12 | Grove**

517 W 10th St

Gospel Music Festival**Oct 19 | Grove**

Har-Ber Village Museum

Hoot & Howl Camp-R-Treat**Oct 19 | Bernice**

Bernice Area at Grand Lake

Jay Fall Fest**Oct 19 | Jay**

327 S 5th St

Haunted Halloween Hayride**Oct 25-27 | Grove**

Har-Ber Village Museum

Drive-In Movie Night**Oct 26 | Grove**

Wolf Creek Park

Sweet Street**Oct 31 | Miami**

Downtown

On the cover: Greg Highsmith, accompanied by wife Becky, accepts an award from the Oklahoma State Auctioneers Association.

Events are published as space allows and must be submitted at least 60 days in advance. Send information to Northeast Connection Events Calendar, PO Box 948, Vinita, OK 74301 or email: publicrelations@noec.coop

Responsible Fleet Stewardship

CONTINUED FROM INSIDE COVER

► **Fleet maintenance** also contributes to fiscal responsibility. While the initial investment in maintenance may seem significant, it pales in comparison to the cost associated with emergency repair, vehicle downtime, and the potential liability resulting from an accident. By proactively maintaining our fleet, we can minimize expense and optimize our operational budget for the benefit of our membership. Given the current economic climate, it is even more important to consider the merits of purchasing new vehicles versus repairing existing ones.

Fleet maintenance is an important, yet often overlooked, aspect of doing business well. While it is easy to take for granted until something breaks, the responsible stewardship of our fleet is something we will always take seriously here at NOEC.

Upper right: from left, NOEC shop employees Eddie Hardin, Paul Hillerman, Seth Collins, Bobby Brigstock, and Brad Hargrove.
Lower right: Brigstock works on a piece of equipment.





Celebrating NATIONAL CO-OP MONTH

Co-op Month is celebrated by cooperatives nationwide during the month of **October**, National Co-op Month is an annual opportunity to raise awareness of a trusted, proven way to do business and build resilient, inclusive communities. **NOEC has operated under the following seven principles since our founding in 1938:**

1

OPEN & VOLUNTARY MEMBERSHIP

Membership in a cooperative is **open** to all people who can reasonably use its services and stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, regardless of race, religion, gender, or economic circumstances.

2

DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL

Cooperatives are **democratic** organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Representatives (directors/trustees) are **elected** among the membership and are accountable to them. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote); cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.

3

MEMBERS' ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the **capital** of their cooperative. At least part of that capital remains the common property of the cooperative. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the cooperative; setting up reserves; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4

AUTONOMY & INDEPENDENCE

Cooperatives are **autonomous**, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control as well as their unique identity.

5

EDUCATION, TRAINING, & INFORMATION

Education and training for members, elected representatives (directors/trustees), CEOs, and employees help them effectively **contribute** to the development of their cooperatives. Communications about the nature and benefits of cooperatives, particularly with the general public and opinion leaders, help boost cooperative understanding.

6

COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES

By working **together** through local, national, regional and international structures, cooperatives improve services, bolster local economies, and deal more effectively with social and community needs.

7

CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

Cooperatives work for the sustainable **development** of their communities through policies supported by the membership.

Learn more at www.noec.coop

Get to Know
GREG HIGHSMITH

LEAST LIKELY



Seventeen years ago, in the fall of 2006, Greg Highsmith recorded a CD featuring eleven country gospel tracks. The project was a labor of love, and the proceeds from the album sales were dedicated to a local school. The name of the album, *Least Likely*, was inspired by an interaction with a former classmate that took place six years earlier during the 25th Welch High School class reunion.

Being labeled “least likely” is, generally speaking, not very complimentary. But when the term was used by a former classmate to describe Greg Highsmith, he took it all in stride. He didn’t perceive the comment as an insult. To his way of thinking, it just meant he’s done some growing up.

Highsmith works as an associate pastor in Miami

► Highsmith has things in his past of which he is not particularly proud. Like most, he has seen his share of shame. So when he volunteered to say the prayer before the meal at his 25th class reunion, former classmates who perhaps knew him better than anyone else, were reminded of his younger years and were somewhat taken aback. Who could blame them?

From a rebellious teen who lived for himself and for the moment, Highsmith had matured into a man for whom family and faith are preeminent.

Classmate Lawana (Jones) Waring thought it fitting to make mention of Highsmith's personal evolution at the reunion.

"Greg, you are the least likely person I would have thought to pray," she said with a smile after Highsmith thanked his Heavenly Father for the meal. The Greg Highsmith she remembered was someone much different than the selfless individual who stood before her now.

"I was just kind of a free spirit," Highsmith said, describing his younger years. "We all drank and carried on and had what we thought at the time was a lot of fun. Church wasn't a big thing back then for us. We were too busy caught up in the moment to be bothered with anything like that. I was just part of the crowd. I wasn't necessarily an outlaw, but we had a good time in a worldly sense."

He added: "I tell everybody who knew me in my youth that I like the guy I am now a lot better than I did the guy I was back then."

MUSICALLY INCLINED

Highsmith began tinkering with music as a form of expression when he was an adolescent. His interest took root when he purchased a guitar with money he'd earned from roping and started taking lessons. Then there was the high school garage band with Charkie Christian and Mitch Horner.

"We were rockers," Highsmith said, recalling the days of playing to prom crowds and teen towns.

His early experience with music gave Highsmith no indication that it would later become such an important avenue of communication. You might even say Highsmith was the "least likely" candidate to be doing a gospel album to help a worthwhile cause.

"After being so vain in the early part of my life, I didn't want to go on an ego trip with the album," said Highsmith. "But I thought if I could do an album and have it benefit the school and not just be about me, I would do it. That's the main reason I did it."

He added: "People told me they listened to that CD while they were on their way to the hospital or driving to a chemo treatment. That warms my heart. God always uses you like he wants to use you and not necessarily how you think you might be used."

FAST TALKER

Highsmith's life has been a winding journey. His career track has made pit stops at banking, carpentry, cowboying and coal mining before arriving at his true calling. He began attending Missouri Auction School in Kansas City in 1986.

"We just had our third child and I was working for a veterinarian," said Highsmith. "We were also running cattle, and I was doing every odd job I could trying to keep our heads above water."

Encouragement from a relative is what sparked the initial interest for Highsmith to do something he had never previously considered.

"My uncle worked at B. F. Goodrich in Miami and the plant shut down about that time," explained Highsmith. "He was headed off to auction school and said 'Why don't you come with me?' I said 'Okay.'"

Highsmith's only experience with any type of auction prior was attending a cattle sale or two.

"I thought I'd go to auction school and start doing auctions on the weekends to supplement our income. I thought it sounded kind of fun. Lo and behold, once I got involved with it, I found that it suited me really well. Mainly, I was looking for it to be a source of income and it ended up being a career choice. It ended up being a main avenue instead of a side interest."

Added Highsmith: "I guess God's got things for each of us to do. When I got into auction school, I truly believed it was what I was meant to do. It was good fit. Things took off really fast for me. It turned out to be a good career choice. Don't get me wrong, I worked hard at it, but it also probably came easier to me than maybe it would someone else."

Highsmith cut his teeth as a bid caller doing livestock auctions. His first auction—a dispersal of cattle for a friend—took place in October of 1986. It grossed \$136,000.

"It was a big success and I was on my way," said Highsmith.

He graduated to tailgate consignment auctions and then from there to farm and household auctions in the four-state area near his home.

"We sold everything from coon dogs to cows," Highsmith said with a chuckle of his early auctioneering days.

Business was good and getting better.

Soon, Highsmith found himself doing five livestock sales each week in addition to keeping up with his own business. In 1988, Highsmith secured his real estate broker license and began selling homes and farms. He was doing 50-60 auctions annually when the opportunity presented itself for him to jump to the big leagues.

Highsmith was discovered in 1999 by Ritchie Bros., an international auction firm based in Canada that at the time had 800 employees worldwide and specialized in brokering industrial equipment. He signed on and became one of the company's ten bid callers in the United States.

"I was what they called a traveling auctioneer," said Highsmith. "I got a set of marching orders and went from sale to sale."

His work had him on the road 180 days out of the year, including a handful of international stops.

"I literally went all over the world," he said. "I've been to Europe, the Middle East, Australia, and Asia. The bulk of my work was here in the United States, but I went overseas anywhere from two to four times a year."

Highsmith still works for Ritchie Bros. (now RB global) but no longer travels. The auction business, like most everything else, was forever changed by the pandemic. Now, most of Highsmith's sales are conducted online.

"Everything looks quite a bit different now than it did 10-20 years ago," Highsmith said. "Of course, the whole landscape of our society is different."

Highsmith's buyers could be from anywhere in the world.

"They come from everywhere. They could be individuals looking for one item or mega-corporations looking to upgrade their fleet. It's not uncommon to sell something in Denver, Colorado, and have a bidder from the United Arab Emirates. A used excavator might go to a third-world country and you're thinking 'Why didn't someone buy that locally?' Now the seller has get it to a port, get it on a barge, on a ship, and send it on overseas. It's fascinating."

► NO SLOWING DOWN

At an age when most men have yielded to the comforts of a recliner with a remote in one hand and a cold beer in the other, Highsmith seems to be of an altogether different persuasion. At 70 years old, he shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, he may actually be getting busier.

Your best bet at finding Highsmith would be at First Christian Church in Miami, where he helps shepherd his church family as an associate pastor. He and wife Becky began attending the church in September 2022 and then became members in January 2023.

"It's a job I really love," he said. "We enjoy the people and what I'm able to do there. We have a great staff to work with. It looks like a big church, and I guess it would be considered big by some standards, but it doesn't have a big church feel. It's been really good."

You may also find Highsmith at one of his grandkids' sporting events or volunteering at an FFA premium sale. He has been involved for many years in the local FFA scene, where his children and grandchildren have always been active participants.

Another cause near and dear to Highsmith's heart is the Welch Round-Up Club, an organization his father "Bud" Highsmith helped start back in 1953. The club, which has grown from about thirty kids to now close to one hundred, hosts several play days each year and also has a year-end awards banquet.

"It's kind of neat to see the club still rolling along after more than seventy years," said Highsmith.

And where you see Greg you are likely to see his beloved wife Becky. The two have three grown children and five grandchildren. They will be celebrating a landmark anniversary in early 2025.

"I'll tell you this, if she doesn't kill me before January 18, 2025, we're going to hit the fifty-year mark," Highsmith smiled. "I'm not sure anyone thought we would make it this far. I'm pretty sure



Highsmith helps his grandson rope a calf

Becky's dad didn't. He told her "He'll be gone in a year. I don't know, I guess we like torturing each other, but I think that's just love."

Highsmith is perhaps best known as an auctioneer, a trade he's been sharpening since 1986. And, he's a good one. Good enough to garner honors as an Oklahoma State Champion Auctioneer in 1991. Good enough to gain recognition as an International Champion Auctioneer in 1994. Good enough to earn a spot in the Oklahoma State Auctioneers Association Hall of Fame in 2004. He's still active in the Oklahoma Auctioneers Association.

"I still have a passion for it and my health is good. I'm thankful I'm still able to do it," he said.

For Highsmith, there is simply no slowing down.

"A lot of people ask me when I'm going retire," he said. "I'm not even thinking about that. I'm having too much fun. I'm not going let the old man in. I'm going to keep rolling. I'm not slowing down. If anything, I'm speeding up. I'm taking on extra jobs. I'm really just enjoying life."

Wherever life takes him, Highsmith's mission is simple.

"I just have a heart to serve people in whatever capacity I can," he said. "I want to be there for families in their time of need and also work really hard to get people to know Jesus. That will always be a goal for me. I'm just a nobody trying to tell everybody."

Trick or Treat

DON'T LET AN ELECTRICAL MISHAP BE YOUR HALLOWEEN TRICK

As you ready your yard and porch for Halloween, make sure the decorations you plug in do not become hazardous. To avoid a Halloween scare, take these safety precautions:

- **Discard** any decorations that have cracked or frayed cords
- **Do not** put any decorations on power poles, padmount transformers or any other electrical equipment.
- Use decorations that are endorsed by a **reputable testing laboratory** such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
- If you are using extension cords outdoors, make sure they are rated for **outdoor use**.
- **Secure** all cords so they do not become tripping hazards.

HAPPY
Halloween



Assistance Agencies

2024 RESOURCE LIST

Craig County

Department of Human Services (DHS).....	918.713.5000
Grand Gateway.....	918.783.5793
Grand Nation/Salvation Army.....	918.276.2192
Grand Lake Community Ministries.....	918.782.2861
Neighbors Helping Neighbors.....	918.713.8088
Salvation Army.....	918.256.2037

Delaware County

Community Action.....	918.253.4683
Cherokee Nation Human Services, Jay.....	918.253.4219
Department of Human Services (DHS).....	918.435.3001
Grand Gateway.....	918.783.5793

Ottawa County

Department of Human Services (DHS).....	918.541.2400
Salvation Army.....	918.542.3467
Grand Gateway.....	918.783.5793

Mayes County

Cherokee Housing Authority.....	918.825.4811
Department of Human Services (DHS).....	918.824.4900
Grand Gateway.....	918.783.5793
Salvation Army/Community Action Pryor.....	918.825.3423

Rogers County

Community Action.....	918.341.5000
Department of Human Services (DHS).....	918.283.8300
Grand Gateway.....	918.783.5793

Northwest Arkansas

Salvation Army.....	479.521.2151
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Contact

Tribes

Cherokee Nation Tribe.....	800.256.0671
Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribe.....	405.422.7476
Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma.....	580.436.7256
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.....	580.924.8280
Delaware Tribe of Oklahoma.....	918.337.6590
Eastern Shawnee Tribe.....	918.666.7710
Kaw Nation.....	580.269.2552 x 231
Kiowa Tribe.....	580.654.2300
Miami Tribe of Oklahoma.....	918.541.1389
Modoc Tribe of Oklahoma.....	918.542.1190
Peoria Tribe.....	918.542.1873
Osage Tribe.....	918.287.5555
Ottawa Indian Tribe.....	918.540.1536
Quapaw Tribe.....	918.542.1853 x 222
Sac and Fox Nation.....	918.968.3526
Seneca-Cayuga Tribe.....	918.787.5452
Shawnee Tribe.....	918.542.2441
United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians	918.871.2800
Wyandotte Nation.....	918.678.2297

Contact



Questions?

Give us a call!

918.256.6405

Featured Recipes

FALL EATS | FROM DELAWARE COUNTY



ULTIMATE POTATO SOUP | CINDY TAYLOR



INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb chopped bacon
- 8 tbs butter
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 cup whole whipping cream
- 3 cloves minced garlic
- 1/4 cup flour
- 8 potatoes, diced
- 4 cups chicken stock

Step 1: Cook bacon in pan then drain off grease. Then add half the butter, celery, and onion and cook until the onion becomes translucent.

Step 2: Stir in garlic and potatoes and sauté for 10 minutes. Then add enough chicken stock to cover potatoes and simmer until they are tender.

Step 2: Melt the other half of the butter in a pot over medium heat while whisking in flour and whole whipping cream until thickened. Then stir in potato mixture. Garnish as desired.



PECAN PIE CUPCAKES | MONA MOORMAN

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/2 cup all purpose flour
- 2 cups chopped pecans
- 2/3 cup softened butter or margarine
- 2 eggs beaten slightly
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1/4 tsp salt

Step 1: Mix butter, eggs, and vanilla together in a large bowl then add sugar, flour, baking soda, salt and pecans to mixture until combined.

Step 2: Use muffin cups to line baking sheet or grease with butter or cooking spray.

Step 3: Spoon batter into muffin tins, 2/3 full and bake at 375°F for 12-13 minutes mini muffins and 15-17 minutes for regular muffins. Top with pecan halves to garnish.

Have a recipe to share? Send it to publicrelations@noec.coop for a chance to be featured in an upcoming edition of *Northeast Connection*.