

*Owned By the People We Serve*

# CVEA History: A Look at Our First 55 Years

A small group of Copper Basin residents met in 1952 to plan the formation of a Rural Electrification Administration (REA) cooperative. They demonstrated confidence in the future development of rural Alaska.

At that time, Central Alaskan Missions (CAM) generated power for its own needs and some nearby Glennallen residents.

Vince Joy, the founder of CAM, saw the possibilities of rural electrification and stimulated the community to organize an association.

When the first general meeting was held in May 1955, the initial board members could not have foreseen the tiny co-op would grow from 38 members to more than 3,600 consumers, providing electricity to approximately 8,000 area residents.

## **Rural Electrification Administration**

Members of Copper Valley Electric Association (CVEA) are beneficiaries of President Roosevelt's New Deal. FDR established the REA

by executive order on May 11, 1935.

Strongly supported by farmers and rural residents, the idea of government support and financing for rural electrification was adamantly opposed by urban power companies and many members of Congress.

After much argument, the Rural Electrification Act was passed by Congress in May 1936, providing funding for REA loans so cooperatives could organize.

After nearly seven years of planning, arranging REA financing, design and construction, the switch was thrown in Glennallen in February 1959. That year, 114 customers purchased 916,000 kilowatt-hours (kwh), which were distributed across 48 miles of line.

Today, CVEA sells 76 million kwh annually across 500 miles of distribution and transmission lines.

## **Overcoming Challenges**

CVEA has provided electrical service to the residents of the Copper River Basin since 1959, and to the

city of Valdez since 1964.

The cooperative has met not only the routine challenges of weather and distance, but extraordinary ones, such as earthquakes, avalanches, pipeline construction and the development of hydropower.

On Good Friday, March 27, 1964, the Great Alaska Earthquake shook the state with unimaginable force. At the Glennallen plant, power was shut down for only four hours.

Valdez, however, was virtually destroyed, and the city was relocated to a new town site. The owner of the existing facilities did not have the means or inclination to restore service, so CVEA purchased the generation and distribution facilities and extended electricity to the new Valdez town site.

## **Copper Valley Telephone Cooperative**

In 1964, CVEA also was instrumental in developing the Copper Valley Telephone Cooperative by providing management, accounting and maintenance support to the fledgling cooperative.

Telephone service was extended to the CVEA service area. In just 10 years, the demand on both utilities was so great the CVEA/CVTC Board voted to separate the utilities in July 1974.

## **Alaska Pipeline**

Construction of the Trans Alaska Pipeline had a huge impact on the communities served by CVEA. In the Copper Basin, demand for electrical power led CVEA to acquire supplemental power from the Glennallen pipeline camp in the winter of 1975.

To meet additional demands





*Above, the Valdez Diesel Plant and the Don Smith Substation. Left, the Valdez Cogeneration plant. Opposite page, the Glennallen Diesel Plant.*

on the system, CVEA installed two 2,600 kilowatt (kw) engines in Glennallen, which began operations the summer of 1976. That same year, two additional diesel engines were installed in Valdez.

#### **Solomon Gulch Hydroelectric Project**

Hydropower has become an integral part of CVEA's power production. As far back as 1965, the board investigated generating power

from the proposed Solomon Gulch Hydroelectric Project.

In 1974, CVEA filed a preliminary application with the Federal Power Commission for construction of the project. Groundbreaking took place in October 1978, and construction was completed in 1981.

In that year, the membership passed a resolution to sell the Solomon Gulch Hydroelectric Project to the Alaska Power Authority. This action led, in part,

to Solomon Gulch and CVEA becoming members of the Four Dam Pool organization. Solomon Gulch became the cooperative's primary power source in May 1982.

#### **Cogeneration Plant**

In 1992, Petro Star, Inc. completed construction of an oil refinery on Dayville Road in Valdez and became CVEA's largest single power user.

In 1996, Petro Star considered installing its own electrical generation at the refinery. In a joint effort, CVEA and Petro Star designed and built a five-megawatt combustion turbine cogeneration facility that provides a needed increment of power to CVEA members and provides recovered heat to Petro Star for use in refining crude oil.

The cogeneration plant began commercial operation April 24, 2000. ■

*Future issues of Ruralite will include additional historical articles about CVEA.*