



2018

ANNUAL MEETING

Leaders laud members, tout co-op's financial fitness, honor retired director

By Will Holford

Nearly 600 Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members and guests filled The Silos on 77 event center in Giddings for the co-op's Annual Meeting on May 8.

They enjoyed live music, informational tables and door prizes, learned about co-op services and conducted the important business of electing three directors.

Board Chairman Ben Flencher opened the business portion of the meeting by thanking Bluebonnet's members.

"We have had another great year at Bluebonnet," Flencher said. "One of the

keys to our success over the years has been the incredible support we get from our members. On behalf of the board of directors and employees, we recognize that our members are the foundation for everything that we do and thank you for your support."



James Kershaw

Flencher also recognized and thanked James Kershaw, who retired from Bluebonnet's board after serving 36 years as a director from Bastrop County. One of the highlights of the meeting was a moving video tribute honoring Kershaw. In the video, Directors Flencher, Richard Schmidt and Roderick L. Emanuel, as well as General Manager Matt Bentke, praised Kershaw



for his dedication, devotion and love for Bluebonnet's members and employees.

"Jimmy Kershaw's gentlemanly demeanor set an example for us to follow and will be part of the culture in our board room for years to come," Flencher said. "He was the face of our organization for so many years and was the strongest advocate for Bluebonnet's members and employees."

Three candidates in Bluebonnet's board election this year were unopposed and elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws. Incumbent Directors Schmidt, District 1, Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe and Hays counties, and Shana Whiteley, District 2, Travis County, retained their board seats. Bryan Bracewell was elected to serve as the director from District 3, Bastrop County.

Schmidt has served on Bluebonnet's board since 1994 and is a former board chairman.

He owned and operated Kreuz Market in Lockhart from 1984 to 2010, when he sold the barbecue business to his son, Keith. Whiteley joined Bluebonnet's board in January 2018, filling a vacancy created by the resignation of former Director Suanna Tumlinson. Whiteley owns two restaurants that serve casual comfort food: the Good Luck Grill in Manor and the Lucky Duck Cafe in Taylor. Bracewell is the third generation of his family to own Southside Market & Barbeque, a business founded in 1882, now with locations in Elgin and Bastrop.

Bluebonnet is a member-owned electric cooperative governed by an 11-member board. Bluebonnet's members elect their directors, who serve staggered three-year terms. One-third of the 11-member board of directors is up for election every year.

General Manager Bentke closed out the business portion of the meeting with a report on the co-op's service to its members and communities, as well as its financial and operational strengths.

"We are in the people business," Bentke said. "Our number one goal at Bluebonnet is to serve our members and our communities, and to make your lives better. We are committed to doing that day in and day out by providing safe, reliable, competitively priced electricity, contributing to charitable organizations that help our members and by volunteering thousands of hours each year in our communities."



Sarah Beal photos

1) Board Chairman Ben Flencher — flanked by the ever-popular door prizes — opens the meeting (See a list of top donors on the page 22).

2) General Manager Matt Bentke greets one of the hundreds of Bluebonnet members attending the meeting.

3) Following the invocation led by Roderick L. Emanuel, board secretary-treasurer, members recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

4) Bluebonnet lineman Jeremy Lynch tells Mona Griffith of Somerville about the gear used by our linemen, while Delphine and Edwin Schultz, also of Somerville, listen in.

5) Grant Gutierrez, chief information officer/comptroller, and David Tobola, manager of operations, help Jeanette Preuss of

Brenham place a star on her home location on a map of the Bluebonnet area, a fun activity for members before the main event.

6) Clayton Brazelton and his wife, Diane Hartgraves, of Ledbetter pose for a photo with Jeremy Lynch and the 'Big B' Bluebonnet logo prop.

7) Daniel Fowler, technology program manager, tells members Lionel and Stephanie Washington of Lincoln about some of the benefits of Bluebonnet membership.

8) The big prize-drawing winners were Van Boston and Angie Watson, who each took home a Cub Cadet riding lawn mower.

9) Phyllis Bickham of Brenham won a 2009 Ford F-150 retired from Bluebonnet's fleet. (Jennifer Schattle photo)

Other highlights of Bentke's report on 2017 performance included reducing operating expenses by \$3.37 million, saving members \$3 million in wholesale power costs and returning \$3.39 million in capital credits. Bentke said this financial performance and the record growth in Bluebonnet's service area have created capacity for the co-op to invest in infrastructure, maintenance and its communities, while borrowing less and increasing equity, which benefits all members.

In addition to the dozens of door prizes given during the meeting, members who registered at the meeting — as well as thousands of members not at the meeting who voted by proxy — were entered in a drawing to win a truck being retired from

Bluebonnet's fleet. Phyllis Bickham of Brenham won the 2009 Ford F-150 extended cab truck. On May 9, Bickham's name was drawn at random from more than 6,200 members who were entered in the drawing.

"When I first got the call I'd won, I thought it was a scam," said Bickham, laughing. "But then I heard it was Bluebonnet, and I knew it wasn't." She plans to use the truck on her farm. ■

