



2002 Inductees



Vincent Erz



In 1946, one railroad car loaded with grain in McIntosh, S.D., needed to be “boxed up” or prepared for shipment.

The local elevator manager asked Vincent Erz, who had recently returned to the community after serving his country in World War II, if he was interested in helping out. That single afternoon turned into a cooperative career that stretched more than four decades for Erz, who retired as manager of the grain division of the South Dakota Wheat Growers Association in 1987. In his role at the cooperative, Erz worked with 15 elevators in northeastern South Dakota.

During his tenure, improvements were made to the elevators so they could handle grain more efficiently. Under Erz’s watch, the volume handled by South Dakota Wheat Growers increased from 3 million bushels to 34 million bushels.

“From 1946 to 1987, during 41 years of service to agricultural cooperatives, Vincent served with a high level of integrity and competence that left a lasting mark on local, state and national grain handling cooperative associations,” wrote Keith Hainy, general manager of North Central Farmers Elevator in Ipswich, S.D., in nominating Erz for the Hall of Fame.



Don Wynia



Elected to the board of directors of Bon Homme Yankton Electric Association in Tabor in 1957, Don Wynia has since gone through 15

elections where his fellow members have returned him to the board. In his 45 years as a director, Wynia figures he’s only missed about three board meetings. (In case you’re wondering, that means that Wynia has attended about 540 monthly meetings of his local cooperative.) Wynia shrugs off that dedication by saying it’s just a responsibility of being a board member.

“Don is a man of integrity and is very committed to his community and he shows that by the involvement he has taken over the years and continues to do so,” wrote Merlin Goehring, general manager of Bon Homme Yankton Electric.

During Wynia’s involvement at Bon Homme Yankton, the cooperative has grown from being simply an electricity provider to a multi-service type business which provides appliance repair and sales, farm and home wiring services, security and health monitoring and was the area’s first Internet service provider.

Through the years, Wynia has also served on the local Farmers Union Oil Co-op board in Tyndall and was an original incorporator of Co-op Inc., a grain elevator and agriculture supply cooperative business which serves area farmers.



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Robert Johnson

Robert Johnson's commitment to cooperatives and rural South Dakota spans more than a half century of service.



Johnson remembers the days when living in the country meant you did without and suffered the ridicule of those who had the "city comforts" that are taken for granted now.

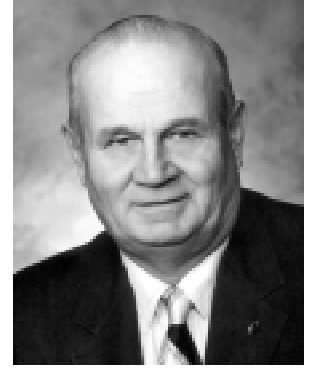
"When I was a child living out here in rural America, my Chicago cousins would come to visit. They'd irritate me to no end about what we didn't have: hot and cold water, no phone, no electricity. I wanted to make sure rural America had parity of living with those in the city.

Johnson's first experience as a cooperative director was on the Groton Farmers Elevator board of directors in 1950. Since then, he has served on eight cooperative boards, including 40 years with James Valley Telecommunications Cooperative (1961 to present), 22 years with Northern Electric Cooperative (1960-1982) and 34 years with the elevator (1950-1984). He also served in the South Dakota Senate from 1958-1964 and was chairman of the Senate Education Committee. He has been a member of the South Dakota Railroad Board for 20 years.

Robert and wife, Marvel, live in Groton where they raised their six children.

Donald Olson

Donald Olson has spent over 40 years seeing that rural residents in the Huron area get reliable electric and water service.



Olson spent 31 years serving on the Beadle Electric Cooperative board and then the Dakota Energy Cooperative board before retiring in 1998. During his tenure, he was one of the members who strongly advocated the consolidation of Beadle Electric Cooperative in Huron and Ree Electric Cooperative in Miller. He continues to serve on the Mid-Dakota Rural Water System board in Miller.

"In his visionary style of leadership, he knew that the consolidation would be better for the members of Beadle, Hand and Hyde counties," wrote Dakota Energy manager Bob Rademacher in nominating Olson. "When the selection of the new name for the new cooperative was being decided, he was not concerned what it was called as long as the word cooperative was in it."

Olson, who was selected as an outstanding young farmer early in his career and was still being recognized for his contributions to ag decades later, said that working with cooperatives came naturally. "It's one of those things that went along with farming."

Olson and wife, Betty, farm north of Huron where they raised their four children.