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Inductees

Leroy Schecher

Leroy Schecher began his co-op career in 1952 as a mechanic and later became general manager of Grand Electric Cooperative and West River Cooperative Telephone Company in northwestern South Dakota. He then served 10 years as general manager of an electric cooperative headquartered in Montevideo, Minn., and one year as an interim manager at FEM Electric Association after his retirement.

Schecher was an original incorporator of Basin Electric Power Cooperative, a generation and transmission cooperative headquartered in North Dakota that provides electricity to 120 electric cooperatives in a nine-state region. He also helped incorporate the former North Central Data Cooperative (now NISC) in Mandan, N.D., and the Cooperative Response Center in Austin, Minn. He served on several regional and national cooperative committees and was a director for the Consumer Federation of America.

“Leroy was a nationally recognized leader and frequently provided assistance to others evaluating the concept of joint operations... He was an advocate for strong national rural electric and rural telephone programs and worked tirelessly to ensure that these programs were available to help cooperatives service the most rural areas. He believed that rural residents should enjoy the same services as urban dwellers and felt that cooperatives were ideal for providing these services,” wrote Darrell Henderson, Schecher’s successor at Grand and West River.

Schecher and his wife, Carol, live in Rapid City.



Ralph Schreurs

Ralph Schreurs was hired as the first manager of the Garretson Cooperative Telephone Association in 1957. The cooperative became known as Splitrock Telephone Cooperative in 1975. Splitrock became the first system in South Dakota and one of the first in the nation to have digital service for its members. Splitrock is now known as Alliance Communications Cooperative.

From 1969 to 1986, Schreurs also served as the executive manager of the South Dakota Association of Telephone Cooperatives. He was responsible for coordination of all SDATC activities including meetings, educational programs, workshops, budgeting, legislation and various other industry activities.

“He also believed strongly in the purpose of the cooperative is to provide services to its members. He instilled a pride and understanding with his staff that they were to always provide the best service possible to the members. This philosophy is still strong today. Ralph continues to remind the present staff that they are only here to serve our members’ needs,” wrote Alliance general manager Don Snyders in his nomination of Schreurs.

Schreurs served on several National Telephone Cooperative Association committees including the Industry Committee and the Futures Committee. In 1977, he received the National Telephone Cooperative Association education Achievement Award in recognition for his outstanding contributions to telecommunications education.

Schreurs and his wife, Wilma, live in Garretson.



2007 Inductees

Merlin VanWalleghen

Merlin VanWalleghen was elected to the Letcher Farmers Elevator board of directors in 1972. He continued to serve as a local agricultural cooperative director through 1995 and served as chairman for a majority of his tenure. He was elected to the Harvest States/CHS Inc. Regional board in 1993 where he served until his retirement in 2006. He also served on the South Dakota Association of Cooperatives board of directors and remains a part of the Heartland Consumers Power District board of directors.

During his tenure on the local co-op board, he saw the cooperative merge with the Farmers Elevator Co-op of Mitchell in 1974. During his tenure on the regional board of Harvest States cooperatives, he helped lead the regional cooperatives through the strategic merger of Cenex and Harvest States, creating the cooperative now known

as CHS, Inc. which is the second-largest cooperative in the United States and No. 188 on the Fortune 500 list. He also served as chairman of the CHS Foundation, an organization committed to investing in the future of rural America, agriculture and cooperative business through education and leadership development.



His nomination said: “Merlin has always embraced the fundamental principals of cooperatives, understanding that the voices of many speaking rationally together are louder than individuals yelling alone. He understands that progress sometimes takes compromise and that growth is required for survival.”

VanWalleghen and his wife, Pat, farm near Letcher, S.D.



What's a Day Like *in Co-op America?*

It begins with coffee from a member-owned fair trade importer and ends with news from a co-op wire service.

In between there's a trip to the co-op childcare center and the co-op health clinic. A stop at the co-op grocery, lunch at a restaurant supplied by a purchasing co-op and time at home in co-op housing. That home is served by an electric co-op and financed by a credit union.

Every day, member-owned cooperative businesses provide Americans with every product and service imaginable. That's life in co-op America.

Cooperatives.
Owned by Our Members,
Committed to Our Communities.

