

2011 Inductees

Jeff Nelson

Jeffrey L. Nelson began his career with East River Electric as a staff assistant in 1974 and worked progressively up the management levels, assuming the general manager position in 1990. He is the fourth person to lead the cooperative and has guided it for a third of its 60-year history.



“Jeff’s excellent leadership, business and technical skills have successfully guided East River into the growing and respected electric utility it is today with more than \$265 million in assets and an annual budget of \$180 million,” wrote Sioux Valley Energy General Manager/CEO Don Marker in nominating Nelson for the award.

“I have found Jeff to be a principled, visionary and knowledgeable leader and colleague whose career contributions have benefited not only East River and its member systems but the entire rural electric program,” Marker continued.

During Nelson’s tenure at the cooperative, he initiated and oversaw the development of a load management system for the co-op, which at the time of its installation, was the largest geographic installation of a load management system in the world. He has also been a champion in protecting hydropower access for rural America and chairs the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s Power and Water Resources Committee.

In 1995, Nelson envisioned and helped implement Rural Electric Economic Development Inc., an innovative economic development fund which has provided more than \$40 million of rural development loans throughout East River’s service area.

Nelson also played an integral role in helping launch the ethanol industry in the state by creating a mechanism that allowed co-op members to use their patronage capitol as security to invest in ethanol development.

Wayne Wright

With 36 years of service to electric cooperatives, Wayne Wright was a long-time advocate for rural electric cooperatives. When his father died in 1972, Wright was appointed to fill his unexpired term on the local electric co-ops board of directors.



Faced with escalating power supply expenses and a dwindling customer base to shoulder the burden, Wright successfully lead the effort to merge Spink Electric with Northern Electric Cooperative in Bath. This effort created a stronger membership, equalized costs and managed growth.

“Throughout his career, Mr. Wright has been a strong, trusted and reasoned voice for the electric cooperative consumers he represented and the rest of the state’s citizenry,” wrote James Moore, general manager/CEO of Northern Electric Cooperative in his letter nominating Wright. “His integrity is undisputable, his dedication unassailable and his beliefs unequivocal.”

In addition to serving on his local electric cooperative boards, he also represented first Spink and then Northern on the East River Electric board of directors, a role he undertook for 24 years, 16 of which in the role of chairman of the East River board. He was the co-op’s fifth chairman.

Wright was also elected to represent South Dakota on the board of directors of MidWest Electric Consumers Association, a regional organization representing the Upper Great Plains cooperatives and other nonprofit electric utilities which purchase hydroelectric power from the federally owned dams on the Missouri River.

East River Electric presented Wright with its Eminent Service Award in 2008 and he received the South Dakota Farmer’s Union Rural Dakota Pride Award in 2009.

Wright and his wife, Bev, live near Turton, S.D.