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**Santee Electric  
Cooperative News**  
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Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

## You are a member, not just a customer

That's the co-op difference!

**MANY BUSINESSES USE** the word “member” to describe their customers. Places like Sam’s Club or Costco and even American Express like to refer to their customers as members. You pay a fee to buy their goods and services, but that is really all you get for the “membership.” No right to vote for the Board of Directors or to participate in any meaningful way in the organization.



In cooperatives like Santee Electric, membership really does mean something more than just the right to buy electricity. Co-ops of all types are founded on seven cooperative principles that give us guidance and strategic direction. Membership also gives you rights as an owner of this co-op.

Brett Fairbairn is the director of the Center for the Study of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada. He makes the case that member relations is not just *part* of what co-ops should be doing, but in fact is the fundamental core business of the cooperative.

He further lays out the three strategic concepts that any co-op must get right in order to survive and thrive:

#### Economic linkage

Santee Electric Cooperative is connected to you. There is a business relationship that serves you (the member) and the co-op. Since co-ops are solely owned by people in the community, they have a mutual interest to ensure that both the co-op and the member do well and prosper.

#### Transparency

As an owner of the co-op, you have a right to know how it operates and how decisions are made that directly impact you. If the co-op is transparent and combines this trait with integrity and fairness, it will build trust with the members.

#### Cognition

In this case, cognition is best defined as how your co-op thinks. It includes the current and historical identity, the mission and the sense of shared values with co-op members. Research, education and training are critical functions that Santee Electric Cooperative must conduct on an ongoing basis to ensure that we always have the best information to make decisions.

The cooperative business model is the best one on earth, but like any enterprise, it is up to the human beings who work at the co-op, who serve on the board and the members like you to ensure that the principles and values do not fade over time.

First and foremost, Santee Electric Cooperative strives to be thought of as a member-owned cooperative that gives you the best value of any utility. If we succeed, our community thrives, and you will always value being a member—not a customer.

**Robert G. Ardis III, P.E.**  
*President and Chief Executive Officer*